MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

"K"

THE AMAZING INTERLUDE

THE STREET OF SEVEN STARS

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MARY ROBERTS RINEHART'S
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THE STREET OF SEVEN STARS

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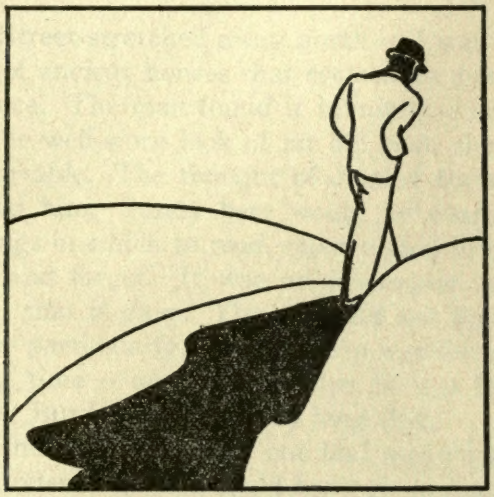

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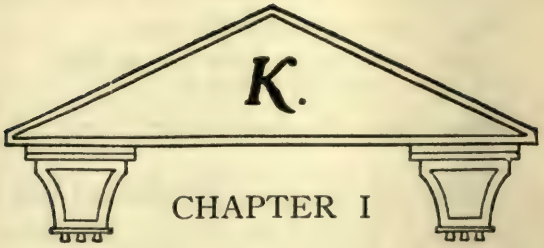


CHAPTER I

THE Street stretched away north and south in two lines of ancient houses that seemed to meet in the distance. The man found it infinitely inviting. It had the well-worn look of an old coat, shabby but comfortable. The thought of coming there to live pleased him. Surely here would be peace — long evenings in which to read, quiet nights in which to sleep and forget. It was an impression of home, really, that it gave. The man did not know that, or care particularly. He had been wandering about a long time — not in years, for he was less than thirty. But it seemed a very long time.

At the little house no one had seemed to think about references. He could have given one or two, of a sort. He had gone to considerable trouble to get them; and now, not to have them asked for —

There was a house across and a little way down the Street, with a card in the window that said: "Meals, twenty-five cents." Evidently the midday meal was over; men who looked like clerks and small shopkeepers were hurrying away. The Nottingham

curtains were pinned back, and just inside the window a throaty barytone was singing:

"Home is the hunter, home from the hill:
And the sailor, home from sea."

Across the Street, the man smiled grimly. Home!

For perhaps an hour Joe Drummond had been wandering up and down the Street. His straw hat was set on the back of his head, for the evening was warm; his slender shoulders, squared and resolute at eight, by nine had taken on a disconsolate droop. Under a street lamp he consulted his watch, but even without that he knew what the hour was. Prayer meeting at the corner church was over; boys of his own age were ranging themselves along the curb, waiting for the girl of the moment. When she came, a youth would appear miraculously beside her, and the world-old pairing off would have taken place.

The Street emptied. The boy wiped the warm band of his hat and slapped it on his head again. She was always treating him like this — keeping him hanging about, and then coming out, perfectly calm and certain that he would still be waiting. By George, he'd fool her, for once: he'd go away, and let her worry. She *would* worry. She hated to hurt any one. Ah!

Across the Street, under an old ailanthus tree, was the house he watched, a small brick, with shallow wooden steps and — curious architecture of the

Middle West sixties — a wooden cellar door beside the steps.

In some curious way it preserved an air of distinction among its more pretentious neighbors, much as a very old lady may now and then lend tone to a smart gathering. On either side of it, the taller houses had an appearance of protection rather than of patronage. It was a matter of self-respect, perhaps. No windows on the Street were so spotlessly curtained, no doormat so accurately placed, no "yard" in the rear so tidy with morning-glory vines over the whitewashed fence.

The June moon had risen, sending broken shafts of white light through the ailanthus to the house door. When the girl came at last, she stepped out into a world of soft lights and wavering shadows, fragrant with tree blossoms not yet overpowering, hushed of its daylight sounds of playing children and moving traffic.

The house had been warm. Her brown hair lay moist on her forehead, her thin white dress was turned in at the throat. She stood on the steps, the door closed behind her, and threw out her arms in a swift gesture to the cool air. The moonlight clothed her as with a garment. From across the Street the boy watched her with adoring, humble eyes. All his courage was for those hours when he was not with her.

"Hello, Joe."

"Hello, Sidney."

He crossed over, emerging out of the shadows into her enveloping radiance. His ardent young eyes worshiped her as he stood on the pavement.

"I'm late. I was taking out bastings for mother."

"Oh, that's all right."

Sidney sat down on the doorstep, and the boy dropped at her feet.

"I thought of going to prayer meeting, but mother was tired. Was Christine there?"

"Yes; Palmer Howe took her home."

He was at his ease now. He had discarded his hat, and lay back on his elbows, ostensibly to look at the moon. Actually his brown eyes rested on the face of the girl above him. He was very happy.

"He's crazy about Chris. She's good-looking, but she's not my sort."

"Pray, what *is* your sort?"

"You."

She laughed softly. "You're a goose, Joe!"

She settled herself more comfortably on the doorstep and drew a long breath.

"How tired I am! Oh — I haven't told you We've taken a roomer!"

"A what?"

"A roomer." She was half apologetic. The Street did not approve of roomers. "It will help with the rent. It's my doing, really. Mother is scandalized."

"A woman?"

"A man."

"What sort of man?"

"How do I know? He is coming to-night. I'll tell you in a week."

Joe was sitting bolt upright now, a little white.

"Is he young?"

"He's a good bit older than you, but that's not saying he's old."

Joe was twenty-one, and sensitive of his youth.

"He'll be crazy about you in two days."

She broke into delighted laughter.

"I'll not fall in love with him — you can be certain of that. He is tall and very solemn. His hair is quite gray over his ears."

Joe cheered.

"What's his name?"

"K. Le Moyne."

"K.?"

"That's what he said."

Interest in the roomer died away. The boy fell into the ecstasy of content that always came with Sidney's presence. His inarticulate young soul was swelling with thoughts that he did not know how to put into words. It was easy enough to plan conversations with Sidney when he was away from her. But, at her feet, with her soft skirts touching him as she moved, her eager face turned to him, he was miserably speechless.

Unexpectedly, Sidney yawned. He was outraged.

"If you're sleepy —"

"Don't be silly. I love having you. I sat up late last night, reading. I wonder what you think of this:

one of the characters in the book I was reading says that every man who — who cares for a woman leaves his mark on her! I suppose she tries to become what he thinks she is, for the time anyhow, and is never just her old self again."

She said "cares for" instead of "loves." It is one of the traditions of youth to avoid the direct issue in life's greatest game. Perhaps "love" is left to the fervent vocabulary of the lover. Certainly, as if treading on dangerous ground, Sidney avoided it.

"Every man! How many men are supposed to care for a woman, anyhow?"

"Well, there's the boy who — likes her when they're both young."

A bit of innocent mischief this, but Joe straightened.

"Then they both outgrow that foolishness. After that there are usually two rivals, and she marries one of them — that's three. And —"

"Why do they always outgrow that foolishness?" His voice was unsteady.

"Oh, I don't know. One's ideas change. Anyhow, I'm only telling you what the book said."

"It's a silly book."

"I don't believe it's true," she confessed. "When I got started I just read on. I was curious."

More eager than curious, had she only known. She was fairly vibrant with the zest of living. Sitting on the steps of the little brick house, her busy mind was carrying her on to where, beyond the

Street, with its dingy lamps and blossoming ailanthus, lay the world that was some day to lie to her hand. Not ambition called her, but life.

The boy was different. Where her future lay visualized before her, heroic deeds, great ambitions, wide charity, he planned years with her, selfish, contented years. As different as smug, satisfied summer from visionary, palpitating spring, he was for her — but she was for all the world.

By shifting his position his lips came close to her bare young arm. It tempted him.

"Don't read that nonsense," he said, his eyes on the arm. "And — I'll never outgrow my foolishness about you, Sidney."

Then, because he could not help it, he bent over and kissed her arm.

She was just eighteen, and Joe's devotion was very pleasant. She thrilled to the touch of his lips on her flesh; but she drew her arm away.

"Please — I don't like that sort of thing."

"Why not?" His voice was husky.

"It isn't right. Besides, the neighbors are always looking out of the windows."

The drop from her high standard of right and wrong to the neighbors' curiosity appealed suddenly to her sense of humor. She threw back her head and laughed. He joined her, after an uncomfortable moment. But he was very much in earnest. He sat bent forward, turning his new straw hat in his hands.

"I guess you know how I feel. Some of the fellows

have crushes on girls and get over them. I'm not like that. Since the first day I saw you I've never looked at another girl. Books can say what they like: there are people like that, and I'm one of them."

There was a touch of dogged pathos in his voice. He was that sort, and Sidney knew it. Fidelity and tenderness — those would be hers if she married him. He would always be there when she wanted him, looking at her with loving eyes, a trifle wistful sometimes because of his lack of those very qualities he so admired in her — her wit, her resourcefulness, her humor. But he would be there, not strong, perhaps, but always loyal.

"I thought, perhaps," said Joe, growing red and white, and talking to the hat, "that some day, when we're older, you — you might be willing to marry me, Sid. I'd be awfully good to you."

It hurt her to say no. Indeed, she could not bring herself to say it. In all her short life she had never willfully inflicted a wound. And because she was young, and did not realize that there is a short cruelty, like the surgeon's, that is mercy in the end, she temporized.

"There is such a lot of time before we need think of such things! Can't we just go on the way we are?"

"I'm not very happy the way we are."

"Why, Joe!"

"Well, I'm not" — doggedly. "You're pretty and attractive. When I see a fellow staring at you,

and I'd like to smash his face for him, I have n't the right."

"And a precious good thing for you that you have n't!" cried Sidney, rather shocked.

There was silence for a moment between them. Sidney, to tell the truth, was obsessed by a vision of Joe, young and hot-eyed, being haled to the police station by virtue of his betrothal responsibilities. The boy was vacillating between relief at having spoken and a heaviness of spirit that came from Sidney's lack of enthusiastic response.

"Well, what do you think about it?"

"If you are asking me to give you permission to waylay and assault every man who dares to look at me —"

"I guess this is all a joke to you."

She leaned over and put a tender hand on his arm.

"I don't want to hurt you; but, Joe, I don't want to be engaged yet. I don't want to think about marrying. There's such a lot to do in the world first. There's such a lot to see and be."

"Where?" he demanded bitterly. "Here on this Street? Do you want more time to pull bastings for your mother? Or to slave for your Aunt Harriet? Or to run up and down stairs, carrying towels to roomers? Marry me and let me take care of you."

Once again her dangerous sense of humor threatened her. He looked so boyish, sitting there with the moonlight on his bright hair, so inadequate to carry out his magnificent offer. Two or three of the star

blossoms from the tree had fallen on his head. She lifted them carefully away.

"Let me take care of myself for a while. I've never lived my own life. You know what I mean. I'm not unhappy; but I want to do something. And some day I shall, — not anything big; I know I can't do that, — but something useful. Then, after years and years, if you still want me, I'll come back to you."

"How soon?"

"How can I know that now? But it will be a long time."

He drew a long breath and got up. All the joy had gone out of the summer night for him, poor lad. He glanced down the Street, where Palmer Howe had gone home happily with Sidney's friend Christine. Palmer would always know how he stood with Christine. She would never talk about doing things, or being things. Either she would marry Palmer or she would not. But Sidney was not like that. A fellow did not even caress her easily. When he had only kissed her arm — He trembled a little at the memory.

"I shall always want you," he said. "Only — you will never come back."

It had not occurred to either of them that this coming back, so tragically considered, was dependent on an entirely problematical going away. Nothing, that early summer night, seemed more unlikely than that Sidney would ever be free to live her own life. The Street, stretching away to the north and to

the south in two lines of houses that seemed to meet in the distance, hemmed her in. She had been born in the little brick house, and, as she was of it, so it was of her. Her hands had smoothed and painted the pine floors; her hands had put up the twine on which the morning-glories in the yard covered the fences; had, indeed, with what agonies of slacking lime and adding blueing, whitewashed the fence itself!

"She's capable," Aunt Harriet had grumblingly admitted, watching from her sewing-machine Sidney's strong young arms at this humble spring task.

"She's wonderful!" her mother had said, as she bent over her hand work. She was not strong enough to run the sewing-machine.

So Joe Drummond stood on the pavement and saw his dream of taking Sidney in his arms fade into an indefinite futurity.

"I'm not going to give you up," he said doggedly. "When you come back, I'll be waiting."

The shock being over, and things only postponed, he dramatized his grief a trifle, thrust his hands savagely into his pockets, and scowled down the Street. In the line of his vision, his quick eye caught a tiny moving shadow, lost it, found it again.

"Great Scott! There goes Reginald!" he cried, and ran after the shadow.

"Watch for the McKees' cat!"

Sidney was running by that time; they were gaining. Their quarry, a four-inch chipmunk, hesitated,

gave a protesting squeak, and was caught in Sidney's hand.

"You wretch!" she cried. "You miserable little beast — with cats everywhere, and not a nut for miles!"

"That reminds me," — Joe put a hand into his pocket, — "I brought some chestnuts for him, and forgot them. Here."

Reginald's escape had rather knocked the tragedy out of the evening. True, Sidney would not marry him for years, but she had practically promised to sometime. And when one is twenty-one, and it is a summer night, and life stretches eternities ahead, what are a few years more or less?

Sidney was holding the tiny squirrel in warm, protecting hands. She smiled up at the boy.

"Good-night, Joe."

"Good-night. I say, Sidney, it's more than half an engagement. Won't you kiss me good-night?"

She hesitated, flushed and palpitating. Kisses were rare in the staid little household to which she belonged.

"I — I think not."

"Please! I'm not very happy, and it will be something to remember."

Perhaps, after all, Sidney's first kiss would have gone without her heart, — which was a thing she had determined would never happen, — gone out of sheer pity. But a tall figure loomed out of the shadows and approached with quick strides.

"The roomer!" cried Sidney, and backed away. "Damn the roomer!"

Poor Joe, with the summer evening quite spoiled, with no caress to remember, and with a potential rival, who possessed both the years and the inches he lacked, coming up the Street!

The roomer advanced steadily. When he reached the doorstep, Sidney was demurely seated and quite alone. The roomer, who had walked fast, stopped and took off his hat. He looked very warm. He carried a suit-case, which was as it should be. The men of the Street always carried their own luggage, except the younger Wilson across the way. His tastes were known to be luxurious.

"Hot, is n't it?" Sidney inquired, after a formal greeting. She indicated the place on the step just vacated by Joe. "You'd better cool off out here. The house is like an oven. I think I should have warned you of that before you took the room. These little houses with low roofs are fearfully hot."

The new roomer hesitated. The steps were very low, and he was tall. Besides, he did not care to establish any relations with the people in the house. Long evenings in which to read, quiet nights in which to sleep and forget — these were the things he had come for.

But Sidney had moved over and was smiling up at him. He folded up awkwardly on the low step. He seemed much too big for the house. Sidney had a panicky thought of the little room upstairs.

"I don't mind heat. I — I suppose I don't think about it," said the roomer, rather surprised at himself.

Reginald, having finished his chestnut, squeaked for another. The roomer started.

"Just Reginald — my ground-squirrel." Sidney was skinning a nut with her strong white teeth. "That's another thing I should have told you. I'm afraid you'll be sorry you took the room."

The roomer smiled in the shadow.

"I'm beginning to think that *you* are sorry."

She was all anxiety to reassure him: —

"It's because of Reginald. He lives under my — under your bureau. He's really not troublesome; but he's building a nest under the bureau, and if you don't know about him, it's rather unsettling to see a paper pattern from the sewing-room, or a piece of cloth, moving across the floor."

Mr. Le Moyne thought it might be very interesting. "Although, if there's nest-building going on, is n't it — er — possible that Reginald is a lady ground-squirrel?"

Sidney was rather distressed, and, seeing this, he hastened to add that, for all he knew, all ground-squirrels built nests, regardless of sex. As a matter of fact, it developed that he knew nothing whatever of ground-squirrels. Sidney was relieved. She chatted gayly of the tiny creature — of his rescue in the woods from a crowd of little boys, of his restoration to health and spirits, and of her expectation,

when he was quite strong, of taking him to the woods and freeing him.

Le Moyne, listening attentively, began to be interested. His quick mind had grasped the fact that it was the girl's bedroom he had taken. Other things he had gathered that afternoon from the humming of a sewing-machine, from Sidney's businesslike way of renting the little room, from the glimpse of a woman in a sunny window, bent over a needle. Genteel poverty was what it meant, and more — the constant drain of disheartened, middle-aged women on the youth and courage of the girl beside him.

K. Le Moyne, who was living his own tragedy those days, what with poverty and other things, sat on the doorstep while Sidney talked, and swore a quiet oath to be no further weight on the girl's buoyant spirit. And, since determining on a virtue is halfway to gaining it, his voice lost its perfunctory note. He had no intention of letting the Street encroach on him. He had built up a wall between himself and the rest of the world, and he would not scale it. But he held no grudge against it. Let others get what they could out of living.

Sidney, suddenly practical, broke in on his thoughts: —

"Where are you going to get your meals?"

"I had n't thought about it. I can stop in somewhere on my way downtown. I work in the gas office — I don't believe I told you. It's rather hap-

hazard — not the gas office, but the eating. However, it's convenient."

"It's very bad for you," said Sidney, with decision. "It leads to slovenly habits, such as going without when you're in a hurry, and that sort of thing. The only thing is to have some one expecting you at a certain time."

"It sounds like marriage." He was lazily amused.

"It sounds like Mrs. McKee's boarding-house at the corner. Twenty-one meals for five dollars, and a ticket to punch. Tillie, the dining-room girl, punches for every meal you get. If you miss any meals, your ticket is good until it is punched. But Mrs. McKee does n't like it if you miss."

"Mrs. McKee for me," said Le Moyne. "I dare say, if I know that — er — Tillie is waiting with the punch, I'll be fairly regular to my meals."

It was growing late. The Street, which mistrusted night air, even on a hot summer evening, was closing its windows. Reginald, having eaten his fill, had cuddled in the warm hollow of Sidney's lap, and slept. By shifting his position, the man was able to see the girl's face. Very lovely it was, he thought. Very pure, almost radiant — and young. From the middle age of his almost thirty years, she was a child. There had been a boy in the shadows when he came up the Street. Of course there would be a boy — a nice, clear-eyed chap —

Sidney was looking at the moon. With that dreamer's part of her that she had inherited from her dead

and gone father, she was quietly worshiping the night. But her busy brain was working, too, — the practical brain that she had got from her mother's side.

"What about your washing?" she inquired unexpectedly.

K. Le Moyne, who had built a wall between himself and the world, had already married her to the youth of the shadows, and was feeling an odd sense of loss.

"Washing?"

"I suppose you've been sending things to the laundry, and — what do you do about your stockings?"

"Buy cheap ones and throw 'em away when they're worn out." There seemed to be no reserves with this surprising young person.

"And buttons?"

"Use safety-pins. When they're closed one can button over them as well as —"

"I think," said Sidney, "that it is quite time some one took a little care of you. If you will give Katie, our maid, twenty-five cents a week, she'll do your washing and not tear your things to ribbons. And I'll mend them."

Sheer stupefaction was K. Le Moyne's. After a moment: —

"You're really rather wonderful, Miss Page. Here am I, lodged, fed, washed, ironed, and mended for seven dollars and seventy-five cents a week!"

"I hope," said Sidney severely, "that you'll put what you save in the bank."

He was still somewhat dazed when he went up the narrow staircase to his swept and garnished room. Never, in all of a life that had been active, — until recently, — had he been so conscious of friendliness and kindly interest. He expanded under it. Some of the tired lines left his face. Under the gas chandelier, he straightened and threw out his arms. Then he reached down into his coat pocket and drew out a wide-awake and suspicious Reginald.

"Good-night, Reggie!" he said. "Good-night, old top!" He hardly recognized his own voice. It was quite cheerful, although the little room was hot, and although, when he stood, he had a perilous feeling that the ceiling was close above. He deposited Reginald carefully on the floor in front of the bureau, and the squirrel, after eyeing him, retreated to its nest.

It was late when K. Le Moyne retired to bed. Wrapped in a paper and securely tied for the morning's disposal, was considerable masculine underclothing, ragged and buttonless. Not for worlds would he have had Sidney discover his threadbare inner condition.

"New underwear for yours to-morrow, K. Le Moyne," he said to himself, as he unknotted his cravat. "New underwear, and something besides K. for a first name."

He pondered over that for a time, taking off his

shoes slowly and thinking hard. "Kenneth, King, Kerr —" None of them appealed to him. And, after all, what did it matter? The old heaviness came over him.

He dropped a shoe, and Reginald, who had gained enough courage to emerge and sit upright on the fender, fell over backward.

Sidney did not sleep much that night. She lay awake, gazing into the scented darkness, her arms under her head. Love had come into her life at last. A man — only Joe, of course, but it was not the boy himself, but what he stood for, that thrilled her — had asked her to be his wife.

In her little back room, with the sweetness of the tree blossoms stealing through the open window, Sidney faced the great mystery of life and love, and flung out warm young arms. Joe would be thinking of her now, as she thought of him. Or would he have gone to sleep, secure in her half promise? Did he really love her?

The desire to be loved! There was coming to Sidney a time when love would mean, not receiving, but giving — the divine fire instead of the pale flame of youth. At last she slept.

A night breeze came through the windows and spread coolness through the little house. The ailanthus tree waved in the moonlight and sent sprawling shadows over the wall of K. Le Moyne's bedroom. In the yard the leaves of the morning-glory vines quivered as if under the touch of a friendly hand.

K. Le Moyne slept diagonally in his bed, being very long. In sleep the lines were smoothed out of his face. He looked like a tired, overgrown boy. And while he slept the ground-squirrel ravaged the pockets of his shabby coat.

CHAPTER II

SIDNEY could not remember when her Aunt Harriet had not sat at the table. It was one of her earliest disillusionments to learn that Aunt Harriet lived with them, not because she wished to, but because Sidney's father had borrowed her small patrimony and she was "boarding it out."

Eighteen years she had "boarded it out." Sidney had been born and grown to girlhood; the dreamer father had gone to his grave, with valuable patents lost for lack of money to renew them—gone with his faith in himself destroyed, but with his faith in the world undiminished: for he left his wife and daughter without a dollar of life insurance.

Harriet Kennedy had voiced her own view of the matter, the day after the funeral, to one of the neighbors:—

"He left no insurance. Why should he bother? He left me."

To the little widow, her sister, she had been no less bitter, and more explicit.

"It looks to me, Anna," she said, "as if by borrowing everything I had George had bought me, body and soul, for the rest of my natural life. I 'll stay now until Sidney is able to take hold. Then I 'm going to live my own life. It will be a little late, but the Kennedys live a long time."

The day of Harriet's leaving had seemed far away to Anna Page. Sidney was still her baby, a pretty, rather leggy girl, in her first year at the High School, prone to saunter home with three or four knickerbockered boys in her train, reading "The Duchess" stealthily, and begging for longer dresses. She had given up her dolls, but she still made clothes for them out of scraps from Harriet's sewing-room. In the parlance of the Street, Harriet "sewed" — and sewed well.

She had taken Anna into business with her, but the burden of the partnership had always been on Harriet. To give her credit, she had not complained. She was past forty by that time, and her youth had slipped by in that back room with its dingy wall-paper covered with paper patterns.

On the day after the arrival of the roomer, Harriet Kennedy came down to breakfast a little late. Katie, the general housework girl, had tied a small white apron over her generous gingham one, and was serving breakfast. From the kitchen came the clump of an iron, and cheerful singing. Sidney was ironing napkins. Mrs. Page, who had taken advantage of Harriet's tardiness to read the obituary column in the morning paper, dropped it.

But Harriet did not sit down. It was her custom to jerk her chair out and drop into it, as if she grudged every hour spent on food. Sidney, not hearing the jerk, paused with her iron in air.

"Sidney."

"Yes, Aunt Harriet."

"Will you come in, please?"

Katie took the iron from her.

"You go. She's all dressed up, and she does n't want any coffee."

So Sidney went in. It was to her that Harriet made her speech: —

"Sidney, when your father died, I promised to look after both you and your mother until you were able to take care of yourself. That was five years ago. Of course, even before that I had helped to support you."

"If you would only have your coffee, Harriet!"

Mrs. Page sat with her hand on the handle of the old silver-plated coffee-pot. Harriet ignored her.

"You are a young woman now. You have health and energy, and you have youth, which I have n't. I 'm past forty. In the next twenty years, at the outside, I 've got not only to support myself, but to save something to keep me after that, if I live. I 'll probably live to be ninety. I don't want to live forever, but I 've always played in hard luck."

Sidney returned her gaze steadily.

"I see. Well, Aunt Harriet, you're quite right. You've been a saint to us, but if you want to go away —"

"Harriet!" wailed Mrs. Page, "you're not thinking —"

"Please, mother."

Harriet's eyes softened as she looked at the girl.

"We can manage," said Sidney quietly. "We'll miss you, but it's time we learned to depend on ourselves."

After that, in a torrent, came Harriet's declaration of independence. And, mixed in with its pathetic jumble of recriminations, hostility to her sister's dead husband, and resentment for her lost years, came poor Harriet's hopes and ambitions, the tragic plea of a woman who must substitute for the optimism and energy of youth the grim determination of middle age.

"I can do good work," she finished. "I'm full of ideas, if I could get a chance to work them out. But there's no chance here. There isn't a woman on the Street who knows real clothes when she sees them. They don't even know how to wear their corsets. They send me bundles of hideous stuff, with needles and shields and imitation silk for lining, and when I turn out something worth while out of the mess, they think the dress is queer!"

Mrs. Page could not get back of Harriet's revolt to its cause. To her, Harriet was not an artist pleading for her art; she was a sister and a bread-winner deserting her trust.

"I'm sure," she said stiffly, "we paid you back every cent we borrowed. If you stayed here after George died, it was because you offered to."

Her chin worked. She fumbled for the handkerchief at her belt. But Sidney went around the table and flung a young arm over her aunt's shoulders.

"Why did n't you say all that a year ago? We've been selfish, but we're not as bad as you think. And if any one in this world is entitled to success, you are. Of course we'll manage."

Harriet's iron repression almost gave way. She covered her emotion with details:—

"Mrs. Lorenz is going to let me make Christine some things, and if hey're all right I may make her trousseau."

"Trousseau—for Christine!"

"She's not engaged, but her mother says it's only a matter of a short time. I'm going to take two rooms in the business part of town, and put a couch in the back room to sleep on."

Sidney's mind flew to Christine and her bright future, to a trousseau bought with the Lorenz money, to Christine settled down, a married woman, with Palmer Howe. She came back with an effort. Harriet had two triangular red spots in her sallow cheeks.

"I can get a few good models—that's the only way to start. And if you care to do hand work for me, Anna, I'll send it to you, and pay you the regular rates. There is n't the call for it there used to be, but just a touch gives dash."

All of Mrs. Page's grievances had worked their way to the surface. Sidney and Harriet had made her world, such as it was, and her world was in revolt. She flung out her hands.

"I suppose I must do something. With you leav-

ing, and Sidney renting her room and sleeping on a folding-bed in the sewing-room, everything seems upside down. I never thought I should live to see strange men running in and out of this house and carrying latch-keys."

This in reference to Le Moyne, whose tall figure had made a hurried exit some time before.

Nothing could have symbolized Harriet's revolt more thoroughly than her going upstairs after a hurried breakfast, and putting on her hat and coat. She had heard of rooms, she said, and there was nothing urgent in the work-room. Her eyes were brighter already as she went out. Sidney, kissing her in the hall and wishing her luck, realized suddenly what a burden she and her mother must have been for the last few years. She threw her head up proudly. They would never be a burden again — never, as long as she had strength and health!

By evening Mrs. Page had worked herself into a state bordering on hysteria. Harriet was out most of the day. She came in at three o'clock, and Katie gave her a cup of tea. At the news of her sister's condition, she merely shrugged her shoulders.

"She'll not die, Katie," she said calmly. "But see that Miss Sidney eats something, and if she is worried tell her I said to get Dr. Ed."

Very significant of Harriet's altered outlook was this casual summoning of the Street's family doctor. She was already dealing in larger figures. A sort of recklessness had come over her since the morning.

Already she was learning that peace of mind is essential to successful endeavor. Somewhere Harriet had read a quotation from a Persian poet; she could not remember it, but its sense had stayed with her: "What though we spill a few grains of corn, or drops of oil from the cruse? These be the price of peace."

So Harriet, having spilled oil from her cruse in the shape of Dr. Ed, departed blithely. The recklessness of pure adventure was in her blood. She had taken rooms at a rental that she determinedly put out of her mind, and she was on her way to buy furniture. No pirate, fitting out a ship for the highways of the sea, ever experienced more guilty and delightful excitement.

The afternoon dragged away. Dr. Ed was out "on a case" and might not be in until evening. Sidney sat in the darkened room and waved a fan over her mother's rigid form.

At half after five, Johnny Rosenfeld from the alley, who worked for a florist after school, brought a box of roses to Sidney, and departed grinning impishly. He knew Joe, had seen him in the store. Soon the alley knew that Sidney had received a dozen Killarney roses at three dollars and a half, and was probably engaged to Joe Drummond.

"Dr. Ed," said Sidney, as he followed her down the stairs, "can you spare the time to talk to me a little while?"

Perhaps the elder Wilson had a quick vision of the crowded office waiting across the Street; but his reply was prompt:—

"Any amount of time."

Sidney led the way into the small parlor, where Joe's roses, refused by the petulant invalid upstairs, bloomed alone."

"First of all," said Sidney, "did you mean what you said upstairs?"

Dr. Ed thought quickly.

"Of course; but what?"

"You said I was a born nurse."

The Street was very fond of Dr. Ed. It did not always approve of him. It said—which was perfectly true—that he had sacrificed himself to his brother's career: that, for the sake of that brilliant young surgeon, Dr. Ed had done without wife and children; that to send him abroad he had saved and skimped; that he still went shabby and drove the old buggy, while Max drove about in an automobile *coupé*. Sidney, not at all of the stuff martyrs are made of, sat in the scented parlor and, remembering all this, was ashamed of her rebellion.

"I'm going into a hospital," said Sidney.

Dr. Ed waited. He liked to have all the symptoms before he made a diagnosis or ventured an opinion. So Sidney, trying to be cheerful, and quite unconscious of the anxiety in her voice, told her story.

"It's fearfully hard work, of course," he commented, when she had finished.

"So is anything worth while. Look at the way you work!"

Dr. Ed rose and wandered around the room.

"You're too young."

"I'll get older."

"I don't think I like the idea," he said at last. "It's splendid work for an older woman. But it's life, child—life in the raw. As we get along in years we lose our illusions—some of them, not all, thank God. But for you, at your age, to be brought face to face with things as they are, and not as we want them to be—it seems such an unnecessary sacrifice."

"Don't you think," said Sidney bravely, "that you are a poor person to talk of sacrifice? Have n't you always, all your life—"

Dr. Ed colored to the roots of his straw-colored hair.

"Certainly not," he said almost irritably. "Max had genius; I had—ability. That's different. One real success is better than two halves. Not"—he smiled down at her—"not that I minimize my usefulness. Somebody has to do the hack-work, and, if I do say it myself, I'm a pretty good hack."

"Very well," said Sidney. "Then I shall be a hack, too. Of course, I had thought of other things, —my father wanted me to go to college,—but I'm strong and willing. And one thing I must make up my mind to, Dr.Ed; I shall have to support my mother."

Harriet passed the door on her way in to a belated supper. The man in the parlor had a momentary glimpse of her slender, sagging shoulders, her thin face, her undisguised middle age.

"Yes," he said, when she was out of hearing. "It's hard, but I dare say it's right enough, too. Your aunt ought to have her chance. Only—I wish it did n't have to be."

Sidney, left alone, stood in the little parlor beside the roses. She touched them tenderly, absently. Life, which the day before had called her with the beckoning finger of dreams, now reached out grim, insistent hands. Life—in the raw.

CHAPTER III

K. Le Moyne had wakened early that first morning in his new quarters. When he sat up and yawned, it was to see his worn cravat disappearing with vigorous tugs under the bureau. He rescued it, gently but firmly.

"You and I, Reginald," he apostrophized the bureau, "will have to come to an understanding. What I leave on the floor you may have, but what blows down is not to be touched."

Because he was young and very strong, he wakened to a certain lightness of spirit. The morning sun had always called him to a new day, and the sun was shining. But he grew depressed as he prepared for the office. He told himself savagely, as he put on his shabby clothing, that, having sought for peace and now found it, he was an ass for resenting it. The trouble was, of course, that he came of a fighting stock: soldiers and explorers, even a gentleman adventurer or two, had been his forefathers. He loathed peace with a deadly loathing.

Having given up everything else, K. Le Moyne had also given up the love of woman. That, of course, is figurative. He had been too busy for women, and now he was too idle. A small part of his brain added figures in the office of a gas company daily, for the sum of two dollars and fifty cents per

eight-hour working day. But the real K. Le Moyne, that had dreamed dreams, had nothing to do with the figures, but sat somewhere in his head and mocked him as he worked at his task.

"Time's going by, and here you are!" mocked the real person — who was, of course, not K. Le Moyne at all. "You're the hell of a lot of use, are n't you? Two and two are four and three are seven — take off the discount. That's right. It's a man's work, is n't it?"

"Somebody's got to do this sort of thing," protested the small part of his brain that earned the two-fifty per working day. "And it's a great anæsthetic. He can't think when he's doing it. There's something practical about figures, and — rational."

He dressed quickly, ascertaining that he had enough money to buy a five-dollar ticket at Mrs McKee's; and, having given up the love of woman with other things, he was careful not to look about for Sidney on his way.

He breakfasted at Mrs. McKee's, and was initiated into the mystery of the ticket punch. The food was rather good, certainly plentiful; and even his squeamish morning appetite could find no fault with the self-respecting tidiness of the place. Tillie proved to be neat and austere. He fancied it would not be pleasant to be very late for one's meals — in fact, Sidney had hinted as much. Some of the "mealers" — the Street's name for them — ventured on various small familiarities of speech with Tillie. K. Le

Moyne himself was scrupulously polite, but reserved He was determined not to let the Street encroach on his wretchedness. Because he had come to live there was no reason why it should adopt him. But he was very polite. When the deaf-and-dumb book agent wrote something on a pencil pad and pushed it toward him, he replied in kind.

"We are very glad to welcome you to the McKee family," was what was written on the pad.

"Very happy, indeed, to be with you," wrote back Le Moyne — and realized with a sort of shock that he meant it.

The kindly greeting had touched him. The greeting and the breakfast cheered him; also, he had evidently made some headway with Tillie.

"Don't you want a toothpick?" she asked, as he went out.

In K.'s previous walk of life there had been no toothpicks; or, if there were any, they were kept, along with the family scandals, in a closet. But nearly a year of buffeting about had taught him many things. He took one, and placed it nonchalantly in his waistcoat pocket, as he had seen the others do.

Tillie, her rush hour over, wandered back into the kitchen and poured herself a cup of coffee. Mrs. McKee was reweighing the meat order.

"Kind of a nice fellow," Tillie said, cup to lips — "the new man."

"Week or meal?"

"Week. He'd be handsome if he was n't so grouchy-looking. Lit up some when Mr. Wagner sent him one of his love letters. Rooms over at Pages'."

Mrs. McKee drew a long breath and entered the lamb stew in a book.

"When I think of Anna Page taking a roomer, it just about knocks me over, Tillie. And where they 'll put him, in that little house—he looked thin, what I saw of him. Seven pounds and a quarter." This last referred, not to K. Le Moyne, of course, but to the lamb stew.

"Thin as a fiddle-string."

"Just keep an eye on him, that he gets enough." Then, rather ashamed of her unbusinesslike methods: "A thin mealer's a poor advertisement. Do you suppose this is the dog meat or the soup scraps?"

Tillie was a niece of Mrs. Rosenfeld. In such manner was most of the Street and its environs connected; in such wise did its small gossip start at one end and pursue its course down one side and up the other.

"Sidney Page is engaged to Joe Drummond," announced Tillie. "He sent her a lot of pink roses yesterday."

There was no malice in her flat statement, no envy. Sidney and she, living in the world of the Street, occupied different spheres. But the very lifelessness in her voice told how remotely such things

touched her, and thus was tragic. "Mealers" came and went—small clerks, petty tradesmen, husbands living alone in darkened houses during the summer hegira of wives. Various and catholic was Tillie's male acquaintance, but compounded of good fellowship only. Once, years before, romance had paraded itself before her in the garb of a traveling nurseryman—had walked by and not come back.

"And Miss Harriet's going into business for herself. She's taken rooms downtown; she's going to be Madame Something or other."

Now, at last, was Mrs. McKee's attention caught, riveted.

"For the love of mercy! At her age! It's downright selfish. If she raises her prices she can't make my new foulard."

Tillie sat at the table, her faded blue eyes fixed on the back yard, where her aunt, Mrs. Rosenfeld, was hanging out the week's wash of table linen.

"I don't know as it's so selfish," she reflected. "We've only got one life. I guess a body's got the right to live it."

Mrs. McKee eyed her suspiciously, but Tillie's face showed no emotion.

"You don't ever hear of Schwitter, do you?"

"No; I guess she's still living."

Schwitter, the nurseryman, had proved to have a wife in an insane asylum. That was why Tillie's romance had only paraded itself before her and had gone by.

"You got out of that lucky."

Tillie rose and tied a gingham apron over her white one.

"I guess so. Only sometimes—"

"Tillie!"

"I don't know as it would have been so wrong. He ain't young, and I ain't. And we're not getting any younger. He had nice manners; he'd have been good to me."

Mrs. McKee's voice failed her. For a moment she gasped like a fish. Then:—

"And him a married man!"

"Well, I'm not going to do it," Tillie soothed her. "I get to thinking about it sometimes; that's all. This new fellow made me think of him. He's got the same nice way about him."

Aye, the new man had made her think of him, and June, and the lovers who lounged along the Street in the moonlit avenues toward the park and love; even Sidney's pink roses. Change was in the very air of the Street that June morning. It was in Tillie, making a last clutch at youth, and finding, in this pale flare of dying passion, courage to remember what she had schooled herself to forget; in Harriet, asserting her right to live her life; in Sidney, planning with eager eyes a life of service which did not include Joe; in K. Le Moyne, who had built up a wall between himself and the world, and was seeing it demolished by a deaf-and-dumb book agent whose weapon was a pencil pad!

And yet, for a week nothing happened. Joe came in the evenings and sat on the steps with Sidney, his honest heart in his eyes. She could not bring herself at first to tell him about the hospital. She put it off from day to day. Anna, no longer sulky, accepted with childlike faith Sidney's statement that "they'd get along; she had a splendid scheme," and took to helping Harriet in her preparations for leaving. Tillie, afraid of her rebellious spirit, went to prayer meeting. And K. Le Moyne, finding his little room hot in the evenings and not wishing to intrude on the two on the doorstep, took to reading his paper in the park, and after twilight to long, rapid walks out into the country. The walks satisfied the craving of his active body for exercise, and tired him so he could sleep. On one such occasion he met Mr. Wagner, and they carried on an animated conversation until it was too dark to see the pad. Even then, it developed that Mr. Wagner could write in the dark; and he secured the last word in a long argument by doing this and striking a match for K. to read by.

When K. was sure that the boy had gone, he would turn back toward the Street. Some of the heaviness of his spirit always left him at sight of the little house. Its kindly atmosphere seemed to reach out and envelop him. Within was order and quiet, the freshness of his turned-down bed, the tidiness of his ordered garments. There was even affection — Reginald, waiting on the fender for his supper, and regarding him with wary and bright-eyed friendliness.

Life, that had seemed so simple, had grown very complicated for Sidney. There was her mother to break the news to, and Joe. Harriet would approve, she felt; but these others! To assure Anna that she must manage alone for three years, in order to be happy and comfortable afterward — that was hard enough. But to tell Joe that she was planning a future without him, to destroy the light in his blue eyes — that hurt.

After all, Sidney told K. first. One Friday evening, coming home late as usual, he found her on the doorstep, and Joe gone. She moved over hospitably. The moon had waxed and waned, and the Street was dark. Even the ailanthus blossoms had ceased their snow-like dropping. The colored man who drove Dr. Ed in the old buggy on his daily rounds had brought out the hose and sprinkled the street. Within this zone of freshness, of wet asphalt and dripping gutters, Sidney sat, cool and silent.

"Please sit down. It is cool now. My idea of luxury is to have the Street sprinkled on a hot night."

K. disposed of his long legs on the steps. He was trying to fit his own ideas of luxury to a garden hose and a city street.

"I'm afraid you're working too hard."

"I? I do a minimum of labor for a minimum of wage."

"But you work at night, don't you?"

K. was natively honest. He hesitated. Then: —

"No, Miss Page."

"But you go out every evening!" Suddenly the truth burst on her.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "I do believe — why, how silly of you!"

K. was most uncomfortable.

"Really, I like it," he protested. "I hang over a desk all day, and in the evening I want to walk. I ramble around the park and see lovers on benches — it's rather thrilling. They sit on the same benches evening after evening. I know a lot of them by sight, and if they're not there I wonder if they have quarreled, or if they have finally got married and ended the romance. You can see how exciting it is."

Quite suddenly Sidney laughed.

"How very nice you are!" she said — "and how absurd! Why should their getting married end the romance? And don't you know that, if you insist on walking the streets and parks at night because Joe Drummond is here, I shall have to tell him not to come?"

This did not follow, to K.'s mind. They had rather a heated argument over it, and became much better acquainted.

"If I were engaged to him," Sidney ended, her cheeks very pink, "I — I might understand. But, as I am not —"

"Ah!" said K., a trifle unsteadily. "So you are not?"

Only a week — and love was one of the things he had had to give up, with others. Not, of course, that he was in love with Sidney then. But he had been desperately lonely, and, for all her practical clear-headedness, she was softly and appealingly feminine. By way of keeping his head, he talked suddenly and earnestly of Mrs. McKee, and food, and Tillie, and of Mr. Wagner and the pencil pad.

"It's like a game," he said. "We disagree on everything, especially Mexico. If you ever tried to spell those Mexican names —"

"Why did you think I was engaged?" she insisted.

Now, in K.'s walk of life — that walk of life where there are no toothpicks, and no one would have believed that twenty-one meals could have been secured for five dollars with a ticket punch thrown in — young girls did not receive the attention of one young man to the exclusion of others unless they were engaged. But he could hardly say that.

"Oh, I don't know. Those things get in the air I am quite certain, for instance, that Reginald suspects it."

"It's Johnny Rosenfeld," said Sidney, with decision. "It's horrible, the way things get about. Because Joe sent me a box of roses — As a matter of fact, I'm not engaged, or going to be, Mr. Le Moyne. I'm going into a hospital to be a nurse."

Le Moyne said nothing. For just a moment he closed his eyes. A man is in rather a bad way when every time he closes his eyes, he sees the same thing,

especially if it is rather terrible. When it gets to a point where he lies awake at night and reads, for fear of closing them —

"You're too young, are n't you?"

"Dr. Ed — one of the Wilsons across the Street — is going to help me about that. His brother Max is a big surgeon there. I expect you've heard of him. We're very proud of him in the Street."

Lucky for K. Le Moyne that the moon no longer shone on the low gray doorstep, that Sidney's mind had traveled far away to shining floors and rows of white beds. "Life — in the raw," Dr. Ed had said that other afternoon. Closer to her than the hospital was life in the raw that night.

So, even here, on this quiet street in this distant city, there was to be no peace. Max Wilson just across the way! It — it was ironic. Was there no place where a man could lose himself? He would have to move on again, of course.

But that, it seemed, was just what he could not do. For: —

"I want to ask you to do something, and I hope you'll be quite frank," said Sidney.

"Anything that I can do —"

"It's this. If you are comfortable, and — and like the room and all that, I wish you'd stay." She hurried on: "If I could feel that mother had a dependable person like you in the house, it would all be easier."

Dependable! That stung.

"But — forgive my asking; I'm really interested — can your mother manage? You'll get practically no money during your training."

"I've thought of that. A friend of mine, Christine Lorenz, is going to be married. Her people are wealthy, but she'll have nothing but what Palmer makes. She'd like to have the parlor and the sitting-room behind. They would n't interfere with you at all," she added hastily. "Christine's father would build a little balcony at the side for them, a sort of porch, and they'd sit there in the evenings."

Behind Sidney's carefully practical tone the man read appeal. Never before had he realized how narrow the girl's world had been. The Street, with but one dimension, bounded it! In her perplexity she was appealing to him who was practically a stranger.

And he knew then that he must do the thing she asked. He, who had fled so long, could roam no more. Here on the Street, with its menace just across, he must live, that she might work. In his world, men had worked that women might live in certain places, certain ways. This girl was going out to earn her living, and he would stay to make it possible. But no hint of all this was in his voice.

"I shall stay, of course," he said gravely. "I — this is the nearest thing to home that I've known for a long time. I want you to know that."

So they moved their puppets about, Anna and

Harriet, Christine and her husband-to-be, Dr. Ed, even Tillie and the Rosenfelds; shifted and placed them, and, planning, obeyed inevitable law.

"Christine shall come, then," said Sidney forsooth, "and we will throw out a balcony."

So they planned, calmly ignorant that poor Christine's story and Tillie's and Johnny Rosenfeld's and all the others' were already written among the things that are, and the things that shall be hereafter.

"You are very good to me," said Sidney.

When she rose, K. Le Moyne sprang to his feet.

Anna had noticed that he always rose when she entered his room, — with fresh towels on Katie's day out, for instance, — and she liked him for it. Years ago, the men she had known had shown this courtesy to their women; but the Street regarded such things as affectation.

"I wonder if you would do me another favor? I'm afraid you'll take to avoiding me, if I keep on."

"I don't think you need fear that."

"This stupid story about Joe Drummond — I'm not saying I'll never marry him, but I'm certainly not engaged. Now and then, when you are taking your evening walks, if you would ask me to walk with you —"

K. looked rather dazed.

"I can't imagine anything pleasanter; but I wish you'd explain just how —"

Sidney smiled at him. As he stood on the lowest step, their eyes were almost level.

"If I walk with you, they'll know I'm not engaged to Joe," she said, with engaging directness.

The house was quiet. He waited in the lower hall until she had reached the top of the staircase. For some curious reason, in the time to come, that was the way Sidney always remembered K. Le Moyne — standing in the little hall, one hand upstretched to shut off the gas overhead, and his eyes on hers above.

"Good-night," said K. Le Moyne. And all the things he had put out of his life were in his voice.

CHAPTER IV

On the morning after Sidney had invited K. Le Moyne to take her to walk, Max Wilson came down to breakfast rather late. Dr. Ed had breakfasted an hour before, and had already attended, with much profanity on the part of the patient, to a boil on the back of Mr. Rosenfeld's neck.

"Better change your laundry," cheerfully advised Dr. Ed, cutting a strip of adhesive plaster. "Your neck's irritated from your white collars."

Rosenfeld eyed him suspiciously, but, possessing a sense of humor also, he grinned.

"It ain't my everyday things that bother me," he replied. "It's my blankety-blank dress suit. But if a man wants to be tony —"

"Tony" was not of the Street, but of its environs. Harriet was "tony" because she walked with her elbows in and her head up. Dr. Max was "tony" because he breakfasted late, and had a man come once a week and take away his clothes to be pressed. He was "tony," too, because he had brought back from Europe narrow-shouldered English-cut clothes, when the Street was still padding its shoulders. Even K. would have been classed with these others, for the stick that he carried on his walks, for the fact that his shabby gray coat was as unmistakably

foreign in cut as Dr. Max's, had the neighborhood so much as known him by sight. But K., so far, had remained in humble obscurity, and, outside of Mrs. McKee's, was known only as the Pages' roomer.

Mr. Rosenfeld buttoned up the blue flannel shirt which, with a pair of Dr. Ed's cast-off trousers, was his only wear, and fished in his pocket.

"How much, Doc?"

"Two dollars," said Dr. Ed briskly.

"Holy cats! For one jab of a knife! My old woman works a day and a half for two dollars."

"I guess it's worth two dollars to you to be able to sleep on your back." He was imperturbably straightening his small glass table. He knew Rosenfeld. "If you don't like my price, I'll lend you the knife the next time, and you can let your wife attend to you."

Rosenfeld drew out a silver dollar, and followed it reluctantly with a limp and dejected dollar bill.

"There are times," he said, "when, if you'd put me and the missus and a knife in the same room, you would n't have much left but the knife."

Dr. Ed waited until he had made his stiff-necked exit. Then he took the two dollars, and, putting the money into an envelope, indorsed it in his illegible hand. He heard his brother's step on the stairs, and Dr. Ed made haste to put away the last vestiges of his little operation.

Ed's lapses from surgical cleanliness were a sore trial to the younger man, fresh from the clinics of

Europe. In his downtown office, to which he would presently make his leisurely progress, he wore a white coat, and sterilized things of which Dr. Ed did not even know the names.

So, as he came down the stairs, Dr. Ed, who had wiped his tiny knife with a bit of cotton, — he hated sterilizing it; it spoiled the edge, — thrust it hastily into his pocket. He had cut boils without boiling anything for a good many years, and no trouble. But he was wise with the wisdom of the serpent and the general practitioner, and there was no use raising a discussion.

Max's morning mood was always a cheerful one. Now and then the way of the transgressor is disgustingly pleasant. Max, who sat up until all hours of the night, drinking beer or whiskey-and-soda, and playing bridge, wakened to a clean tongue and a tendency to have a cigarette between shoes, so to speak. Ed, whose wildest dissipation had perhaps been to bring into the world one of the neighborhood's babies, wakened customarily to the dark hour of his day, when he dubbed himself failure and loathed the Street with a deadly loathing.

So now Max brought his handsome self down the staircase and paused at the office door.

"At it already," he said. "Or have you been to bed?"

"It's after nine," protested Ed mildly. "If I don't start early, I never get through."

Max yawned.

"Better come with me," he said. "If things go on as they've been doing, I'll have to have an assistant. I'd rather have you than anybody, of course." He put his lithe surgeon's hand on his brother's shoulder. "Where would I be if it had n't been for you? All the fellows know what you've done."

In spite of himself, Ed winced. It was one thing to work hard that there might be one success instead of two half successes. It was a different thing to advertise one's mediocrity to the world. His sphere of the Street and the neighborhood was his own. To give it all up and become his younger brother's assistant — even if it meant, as it would, better hours and more money — would be to submerge his identity. He could not bring himself to it.

"I guess I'll stay where I am," he said. "They know me around here, and I know them. By the way, will you leave this envelope at Mrs. McKee's? Maggie Rosenfeld is ironing there to-day. It's for her."

Max took the envelope absently.

"You'll go on here to the end of your days, working for a pittance," he objected. 'Inside of ten years there'll be no general practitioners; then where will you be?"

"I'll manage somehow," said his brother placidly. "I guess there will always be a few that can pay my prices better than what you specialists ask."

Max laughed with genuine amusement.

"I dare say, if this is the way you let them pay your prices."

He held out the envelope, and the older man colored.

Very proud of Dr. Max was his brother, unselfishly proud, of his skill, of his handsome person, of his easy good manners; very humble, too, of his own knowledge and experience. If he ever suspected any lack of finer fiber in Max, he put the thought away. Probably he was too rigid himself. Max was young, a hard worker. He had a right to play hard.

He prepared his black bag for the day's calls — stethoscope, thermometer, eye-cup, bandages, case of small vials, a lump of absorbent cotton in a not over-fresh towel; in the bottom, a heterogeneous collection of instruments, a roll of adhesive plaster, a bottle or two of sugar-of-milk tablets for the children, a dog collar that had belonged to a dead collie, and had got in the bag in some curious fashion and there remained.

He prepared the bag a little nervously, while Max ate. He felt that modern methods and the best usage might not have approved of the bag. On his way out he paused at the dining-room door.

"Are you going to the hospital?"

"Operating at four — wish you could come in."

"I'm afraid not, Max. I've promised Sidney Page to speak about her to you. She wants to enter the training-school."

"Too young," said Max briefly. "Why, she can't be over sixteen."

"She's eighteen."

"Well, even eighteen. Do you think any girl of that age is responsible enough to have life and death put in her hands? Besides, although I haven't noticed her lately, she used to be a pretty little thing. There is no use filling up the wards with a lot of ornaments; it keeps the internes all stewed up."

"Since when," asked Dr. Ed mildly, "have you found good looks in a girl a handicap?"

In the end they compromised. Max would see Sidney at his office. It would be better than having her run across the Street — would put things on the right footing. For, if he did have her admitted, she would have to learn at once that he was no longer "Dr. Max"; that, as a matter of fact, he was now staff, and entitled to much dignity, to speech without contradiction or argument, to clean towels, and a deferential interne at his elbow.

Having given his promise, Max promptly forgot about it. The Street did not interest him. Christine and Sidney had been children when he went to Vienna, and since his return he had hardly noticed them. Society, always kind to single men of good appearance and easy good manners, had taken him up. He wore dinner or evening clothes five nights out of seven, and was supposed by his conservative old neighbors to be going the pace. The rumor had been fed by Mrs. Rosenfeld, who, starting out for her day's washing at six o'clock one morning, had

found Dr. Max's car, lamps lighted and engine going, drawn up before the house door, with its owner asleep at the wheel. The story traveled the length of the Street that day.

"Him," said Mrs. Rosenfeld, who was occasionally flowery, "sittin' up as straight as this washboard, and his silk hat shinin' in the sun; but, exceptin' the car, which was workin' hard and gettin' nowhere, the whole outfit in the arms of Morpheus."

Mrs. Lorenz, whose day it was to have Mrs. Rosenfeld, and who was unfamiliar with mythology, gasped at the last word.

"Mercy!" she said. "Do you mean to say he's got that awful drug habit!"

Down the clean steps went Dr. Max that morning, a big man, almost as tall as K. Le Moyne, eager of life, strong and a bit reckless, not fine, perhaps, but not evil. He had the same zest of living as Sidney, but with this difference — the girl stood ready to give herself to life: he knew that life would come to him. All-dominating male was Dr. Max, that morning, as he drew on his gloves before stepping into his car. It was after nine o'clock. K. Le Moyne had been an hour at his desk. The McKee napkins lay ironed in orderly piles.

Nevertheless, Dr. Max was suffering under a sense of defeat as he rode downtown. The night before, he had proposed to a girl and had been rejected. He was not in love with the girl, — she would have

been a suitable wife, and a surgeon ought to be married; it gives people confidence, — but his pride was hurt. He recalled the exact words of the rejection.

"You're too good-looking, Max," she had said, "and that's the truth. Now that operations are as popular as fancy dancing, and much less bother, half the women I know are crazy about their surgeons. I'm too fond of my peace of mind."

"But, good Heavens! have n't you any confidence in me?" he had demanded.

"None whatever, Max dear." She had looked at him with level, understanding eyes.

He put the disagreeable recollection out of his mind as he parked his car and made his way to his office. Here would be people who believed in him, from the middle-aged nurse in her prim uniform to the row of patients sitting stiffly around the walls of the waiting-room. Dr. Max, pausing in the hall outside the door of his private office, drew a long breath. This was the real thing — work and plenty of it, a chance to show the other men what he could do, a battle to win! No humanitarian was he, but a fighter: each day he came to his office with the same battle lust.

The office nurse had her back to him. When she turned, he faced an agreeable surprise. Instead of Miss Simpson, he faced a young and attractive girl, faintly familiar.

"We tried to get you by telephone," she explained. "I am from the hospital. Miss Simpson's father died this morning, and she knew you would have to have some one. I was just starting for my vacation, so they sent me."

"Rather a poor substitute for a vacation," he commented.

She was a very pretty girl. He had seen her before in the hospital, but he had never really noticed how attractive she was. Rather stunning she was, he thought. The combination of yellow hair and dark eyes was unusual. He remembered, just in time, to express regret at Miss Simpson's bereavement.

"I am Miss Harrison," explained the substitute, and held out his long white coat. The ceremony, purely perfunctory with Miss Simpson on duty, proved interesting, Miss Harrison, in spite of her high heels, being small and the young surgeon tall. When he was finally in the coat, she was rather flushed and palpitating.

"But I *knew* your name, of course," lied Dr. Max. "And — I'm sorry about the vacation."

After that came work. Miss Harrison was nimble and alert, but the surgeon worked quickly and with few words, was impatient when she could not find the things he called for, even broke into restrained profanity now and then. She went a little pale over her mistakes, but preserved her dignity and her wits. Now and then he found her dark eyes fixed on him, with something inscrutable but pleasing in their

depths. The situation was rather piquant. Consciously he was thinking only of what he was doing. Subconsciously his busy ego was finding solace after last night's rebuff.

Once, during the cleaning up between cases, he dropped to a personality. He was drying his hands, while she placed freshly sterilized instruments on a glass table.

"You are almost a foreign type, Miss Harrison. Last year, in a London ballet, I saw a blonde Spanish girl who looked like you."

"My mother was a Spaniard." She did not look up.

Where Miss Simpson was in the habit of clumping through the morning in flat, heavy shoes, Miss Harrison's small heels beat a busy tattoo on the tiled floor. With the rustling of her starched dress, the sound was essentially feminine, almost insistent. When he had time to notice it, it amused him that he did not find it annoying.

Once, as she passed him a bistoury, he deliberately placed his fine hand over her fingers and smiled into her eyes. It was play for him; it lightened the day's work.

Sidney was in the waiting-room. There had been no tedium in the morning's waiting. Like all imaginative people, she had the gift of dramatizing herself. She was seeing herself in white from head to foot, like this efficient young woman who came now and then to the waiting-room door; she was healing

the sick and closing tired eyes; she was even imagining herself proposed to by an aged widower with grown children and quantities of money, one of her patients.

She sat very demurely in the waiting-room with a magazine in her lap, and told her aged patient that she admired and respected him, but that she had given herself to the suffering poor.

"Everything in the world that you want," begged the elderly gentleman. "You should see the world, child, and I will see it again through your eyes. To Paris first for clothes and the opera, and then —"

"But I do not love you," Sidney replied, mentally but steadily. "In all the world I love only one man. He is —"

She hesitated here. It certainly was not Joe, or K. Le Moyne of the gas office. It seemed to her suddenly very sad that there was no one she loved. So many people went into hospitals because they had been disappointed in love.

"Dr. Wilson will see you now."

She followed Miss Harrison into the consulting-room. Dr. Max — not the gloved and hatted Dr. Max of the Street, but a new person, one she had never known — stood in his white office, tall, dark-eyed, dark-haired, competent, holding out his long, immaculate surgeon's hand and smiling down at her.

Men, like jewels, require a setting. A clerk on a high stool, poring over a ledger, is not unimpressive

or a cook over her stove. But place the cook on the stool, poring over the ledger! Dr. Max, who had lived all his life on the edge of Sidney's horizon, now, by the simple changing of her point of view, loomed large and magnificent. Perhaps he knew it. Certainly he stood very erect. Certainly, too, there was considerable manner in the way in which he asked Miss Harrison to go out and close the door behind her.

Sidney's heart, considering what was happening to it, behaved very well.

"For goodness' sake, Sidney," said Dr. Max, "here you are a young lady and I've never noticed it!"

This, of course, was not what he had intended to say, being staff and all that. But Sidney, visibly palpitant, was very pretty, much prettier than the Harrison girl, beating a tattoo with her heels in the next room.

Dr. Max, belonging to the class of man who settles his tie every time he sees an attractive woman, thrust his hands into the pockets of his long white coat and surveyed her quizzically.

"Did Dr. Ed tell you?"

"Sit down. He said something about the hospital. How's your mother and Aunt Harriet?"

"Very well — that is, mother's never quite well." She was sitting forward on her chair, her wide young eyes on him. "Is that — is your nurse from the hospital here?"

"Yes. But she's not my nurse. She's a substitute."

"The uniform is so pretty." Poor Sidney! with all the things she had meant to say about a life of service, and that, although she was young, she was terribly in earnest.

"It takes a lot of plugging before one gets the uniform. Look here, Sidney; if you are going to the hospital because of the uniform, and with any idea of soothing fevered brows and all that nonsense —"

She interrupted him, deeply flushed. Indeed, no. She wanted to work. She was young and strong, and surely a pair of willing hands — that was absurd about the uniform. She had no silly ideas. There was so much to do in the world, and she wanted to help. Some people could give money, but she could n't. She could only offer service. And, partly through earnestness and partly through excitement, she ended in a sort of nervous sob, and, going to the window, stood with her back to him.

He followed her, and, because they were old neighbors, she did not resent it when he put his hand on her shoulder.

"I don't know — of course, if you feel like that about it," he said, "we'll see what can be done. It's hard work, and a good many times it seems futile. They die, you know, in spite of all we can do. And there are many things that are worse than death —"

His voice trailed off. When he had started out in his profession, he had had some such ideal of service

as this girl beside him. For just a moment, as he stood there close to her, he saw things again with the eyes of his young faith: to relieve pain, to straighten the crooked, to hurt that he might heal,— not to show the other men what he could do, — that had been his early creed. He sighed a little as he turned away.

"I'll speak to the superintendent about you," he said. "Perhaps you'd like me to show you around a little."

"When? To-day?"

He had meant in a month, or a year. It was quite a minute before he replied: —

"Yes, to-day, if you say. I'm operating at four. How about three o'clock?"

She held out both hands, and he took them, smiling.

"You are the kindest person I ever met."

"And — perhaps you'd better not say you are applying until we find out if there is a vacancy."

"May I tell one person?"

"Mother?"

"No. We — we have a roomer now. He is very much interested. I should like to tell him."

He dropped her hands and looked at her in mock severity.

"Much interested! Is he in love with you?"

"Mercy, no!"

"I don't believe it. I'm jealous. You know, I've always been more than half in love with you myself!"

Play for him — the same victorious instinct that had made him touch Miss Harrison's fingers as she gave him the instrument. And Sidney knew how it was meant; she smiled into his eyes and drew down her veil briskly.

"Then we'll say at three," she said calmly, and took an orderly and unflurried departure.

But the little seed of tenderness had taken root. Sidney, passing in the last week or two from girlhood to womanhood, — outgrowing Joe, had she only known it, as she had outgrown the Street, — had come that day into her first contact with a man of the world. True, there was K. Le Moyne. But K. was now of the Street, of that small world of one dimension that she was leaving behind her.

She sent him a note at noon, with word to Tillie at Mrs. McKee's to put it under his plate: —

DEAR MR. LE MOYNE, — I am so excited I can hardly write. Dr. Wilson, the surgeon, is going to take me through the hospital this afternoon. Wish me luck.

SIDNEY PAGE.

K. read it, and, perhaps because the day was hot and his butter soft and the other "mealers" irritable with the heat, he ate little or no luncheon. Before he went out into the sun, he read the note again. To his jealous eyes came a vision of that excursion to the hospital. Sidney, all vibrant eagerness, lumi-

nous of eye, quick of bosom; and Wilson, sardonically smiling, amused and interested in spite of himself. He drew a long breath, and thrust the note in his pocket.

The little house across the way sat square in the sun. The shades of his windows had been lowered against the heat. K. Le Moyne made an impulsive movement toward it, and checked himself.

As he went down the Street, Wilson's car came around the corner. Le Moyne moved quietly into the shadow of the church and watched the car go by.

CHAPTER V

SIDNEY and K. Le Moyne sat under a tree and talked. In Sidney's lap lay a small pasteboard box, punched with many holes. It was the day of releasing Reginald, but she had not yet been able to bring herself to the point of separation. Now and then a furry nose protruded from one of the apertures and sniffed the welcome scent of pine and buttonball, red and white clover, the thousand spicy odors of field and woodland.

"And so," said K. Le Moyne, "you liked it all? It did n't startle you?"

"Well, in one way, of course — you see, I did n't know it was quite like that: all order and peace and quiet, and white beds and whispers, on top, — you know what I mean, — and the misery there just the same. Have you ever gone through a hospital?"

K. Le Moyne was stretched out on the grass, his arms under his head. For this excursion to the end of the street-car line he had donned a pair of white flannel trousers and a belted Norfolk coat. Sidney had been divided between pride in his appearance and fear that the Street would deem him overdressed.

At her question he closed his eyes, shutting out the peaceful arch and the bit of blue heaven overhead. He did not reply at once.

"Good gracious, I believe he's asleep!" said Sidney to the pasteboard box.

But he opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"I've been around hospitals a little. I suppose now there is no question about your going?"

"The superintendent said I was young, but that any protégée of Dr. Wilson's would certainly be given a chance."

"It is hard work, night and day."

"Do you think I am afraid of work?"

"And — Joe?"

Sidney colored vigorously and sat erect.

"He is very silly. He's taken all sorts of idiotic notions in his head."

"Such as —"

"Well, he *hates* the hospital, of course. As if, even if I meant to marry him, it would n't be years before he can be ready."

"Do you think you are quite fair to Joe?"

"I have n't promised to marry him."

"But he thinks you mean to. If you have quite made up your mind not to, better tell him, don't you think? What — what are these idiotic notions?"

Sidney considered, poking a slim finger into the little holes in the box.

"You can see how stupid he is, and — and young. For one thing, he's jealous of you!"

"I see. Of course that is silly, although your attitude toward his suspicion is hardly flattering to me!"

He smiled up at her.

"I told him that I had asked you to bring me here to-day. He was furious. And that was n't all."

"No?"

"He said I was flirting desperately with Dr. Wilson. You see, the day we went through the hospital, it was hot, and we went to Henderson's for soda-water. And, of course, Joe was there. It was really dramatic."

K. Le Moyne was daily gaining the ability to see things from the angle of the Street. A month ago he could have seen no situation in two people, a man and a girl, drinking soda-water together, even with a boy lover on the next stool. Now he could view things through Joe's tragic eyes. And there was more than that. All day he had noticed how inevitably the conversation turned to the young surgeon. Did they start with Reginald, with the condition of the morning-glory vines, with the proposition of taking up the quaint paving-stones and macadamizing the Street, they ended with the younger Wilson.

Sidney's active young brain, turned inward for the first time in her life, was still on herself.

"Mother is plaintively resigned — and Aunt Harriet has been a trump. She's going to keep her room. It's really up to you."

"To me?"

"To your staying on. Mother trusts you absolutely. I hope you noticed that you got one of the apostle spoons with the custard she sent up to you

the other night. And she did n't object to this trip to-day. Of course, as she said herself, it is n't as if you were young, or at all wild."

In spite of himself, K. was rather startled. He felt old enough, God knew, but he had always thought of it as an age of the spirit. How old did this child think he was?

"I have promised to stay on, in the capacity of watch-dog, burglar-alarm, and occasional recipient of an apostle spoon in a dish of custard. Lightning-conductor, too — your mother says she is n't afraid of storms if there is a man in the house. I 'll stay, of course."

The thought of his age weighed on him. He rose to his feet and threw back his fine shoulders.

"Aunt Harriet and your mother and Christine and her husband-to-be, whatever his name is — we'll be a happy family. But, I warn you, if I ever hear of Christine's husband getting an apostle spoon — "

She smiled up at him. "You are looking very grand to-day. But you have grass stains on your white trousers. Perhaps Katie can take them out."

Quite suddenly K. felt that she thought him too old for such frivolity of dress. It put him on his mettle.

"How old do you think I am, Miss Sidney?"

She considered, giving him, after her kindly way, the benefit of the doubt.

"Not over forty, I'm sure."

"I'm almost thirty. It is middle age, of course, but — it is not senility."

She was genuinely surprised, almost disturbed.

"Perhaps we'd better not tell mother," she said. "You don't mind being thought older?"

"Not at all."

Clearly the subject of his years did not interest her vitally, for she harked back to the grass stains.

"I'm afraid you're not saving, as you promised. Those are new clothes, aren't they?"

"No, indeed. Bought years ago in England — the coat in London, the trousers in Bath, on a motor tour. Cost something like twelve shillings. Awfully cheap. They wear them for cricket."

That was a wrong move, of course. Sidney must hear about England; and she marveled politely, in view of his poverty, about his being there. Poor Le Moyne floundered in a sea of mendacity, rose to a truth here and there, clutched at luncheon, and achieved safety at last.

"To think," said Sidney, "that you have really been across the ocean! I never knew but one person who had been abroad. It is Dr. Max Wilson."

Back again to Dr. Max! Le Moyne, unpacking sandwiches from a basket, was aroused by a sheer resentment to indiscretion.

"You like this Wilson chap pretty well, don't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You talk about him rather a lot."

This was sheer recklessness, of course. He expected fury, annihilation. He did not look up, but busied himself with the luncheon. When the silence grew oppressive, he ventured to glance toward her. She was leaning forward, her chin cupped in her palms, staring out over the valley that stretched at their feet.

"Don't speak to me for a minute or two," she said. "I'm thinking over what you have just said."

Manlike, having raised the issue, K. would have given much to evade it. Not that he had owned himself in love with Sidney. Love was not for him. But into his loneliness and despair the girl had come like a ray of light. She typified that youth and hope that he had felt slipping away from him. Through her clear eyes he was beginning to see a new world. Lose her he must, and that he knew; but not this way.

Down through the valley ran a shallow river, making noisy pretensions to both depth and fury. He remembered just such a river in the Tyrol, with this same Wilson on a rock, holding the hand of a pretty Austrian girl, while he snapped the shutter of a camera. He had that picture somewhere now; but the girl was dead, and, of the three, Wilson was the only one who had met life and vanquished it.

"I've known him all my life," Sidney said at last. "You're perfectly right about one thing: I talk about him and I think about him. I'm being candid, because what's the use of being friends if we're not frank? I admire him — you'd have to see him in

the hospital, with every one deferring to him and all that, to understand. And when you think of a man like that, who holds life and death in his hands, of course you rather thrill. I—I honestly believe that's all there is to it."

"If that's the whole thing, that's hardly a mad passion." He tried to smile; succeeded faintly.

"Well, of course, there's this, too. I know he 'll never look at me. I 'll be one of forty nurses; indeed, for three months I 'll be only a probationer. He 'll probably never even remember I 'm in the hospital at all."

"I see. Then, if you thought he was in love with you, things would be different?"

"If I thought Dr. Max Wilson was in love with me," said Sidney solemnly, "I 'd go out of my head with joy."

One of the new qualities that K. Le Moyne was cultivating was of living each day for itself. Having no past and no future, each day was worth exactly what it brought. He was to look back to this day with mingled feelings: sheer gladness at being out in the open with Sidney; the memory of the shock with which he realized that she was, unknown to herself, already in the throes of a romantic attachment for Wilson; and, long, long after, when he had gone down to the depths with her and saved her by his steady hand, with something of mirth for the untoward happening that closed the day.

Sidney fell into the river.

They had released Reginald, released him with the tribute of a shamefaced tear on Sidney's part and a handful of chestnuts from K. The little squirrel had squeaked his gladness, and, tail erect, had darted into the grass.

"Ungrateful little beast!" said Sidney, and dried her eyes. "Do you suppose he'll ever think of the nuts again, or find them?"

"He'll be all right," K. replied. "The little beggar can take care of himself, if only —"

"If only what?"

"If only he is n't too friendly. He's apt to crawl into the pockets of any one who happens around."

She was alarmed at that. To make up for his indiscretion, K. suggested a descent to the river. She accepted eagerly, and he helped her down. That was another memory that outlasted the day — her small warm hand in his; the time she slipped and he caught her; the pain in her eyes at one of his thoughtless remarks.

"I'm going to be pretty lonely," he said, when she had paused in the descent and was taking a stone out of her low shoe. "Reginald gone, and you going! I shall hate to come home at night." And then, seeing her wince: "I've been whining all day. For Heaven's sake, don't look like that. If there's one sort of man I detest more than another, it's a man who is sorry for himself. Do you suppose your mother would object if we stayed out here at the

hotel for supper? I've ordered a moon, orange-yellow and extra size."

"I should hate to have anything ordered and wasted."

"Then we'll stay."

"It's fearfully extravagant."

"I'll be thrifty as to moons while you are in the hospital."

So it was settled. And, as it happened, Sidney had to stay, anyhow. For, having perched herself out in the river on a sugar-loaf rock, she slid, slowly but with a dreadful inevitability, into the water. K. happened to be looking in another direction. So it occurred that at one moment Sidney sat on a rock, fluffy white from head to feet, entrancingly pretty, and knowing it, and the next she was standing neck deep in water, much too startled to scream, and trying to be dignified under the rather trying circumstances. K. had not looked around. The splash had been a gentle one.

"If you will be good enough," said Sidney, with her chin well up, "to give me your hand or a pole or something — because if the river rises an inch I shall drown."

To his undying credit, K. Le Moyne did not laugh when he turned and saw her. He went out on the sugar-loaf rock, and lifted her bodily up its slippery sides. He had prodigious strength, in spite of his leanness.

"Well!" said Sidney, when they were both on the rock, carefully balanced.

"Are you cold?"

"Not a bit. But horribly unhappy. I must look a sight." Then, remembering her manners, as the Street had it, she said primly: —

"Thank you for saving me."

"There was n't any danger, really, unless — unless the river had risen."

And then, suddenly, he burst into delighted laughter, the first, perhaps, for months. He shook with it, struggled at the sight of her injured face to restrain it, achieved finally a degree of sobriety by fixing his eyes on the river-bank.

"When you have quite finished," said Sidney severely, "perhaps you will take me to the hotel. I dare say I shall have to be washed and ironed."

He drew her cautiously to her feet. Her wet skirts clung to her; her shoes were sodden and heavy. She clung to him frantically, her eyes on the river below. With the touch of her hands the man's mirth died. He held her very carefully, very tenderly, as one holds something infinitely precious.

CHAPTER VI

THE same day Dr. Max operated at the hospital. It was a Wilson day, the young surgeon having six cases. One of the innovations Dr. Max had made was to change the hour for major operations from early morning to mid-afternoon. He could do as well later in the day, — his nerves were steady, and uncounted numbers of cigarettes did not make his hand shake, — and he hated to get up early.

The staff had fallen into the way of attending Wilson's operations. His technique was good; but technique alone never gets a surgeon anywhere. Wilson was getting results. Even the most jealous of that most jealous of professions, surgery, had to admit that he got results.

Operations were over for the afternoon. The last case had been wheeled out of the elevator. The pit of the operating-room was in disorder — towels everywhere, tables of instruments, steaming sterilizers. Orderlies were going about, carrying out linens, emptying pans. At a table two nurses were cleaning instruments and putting them away in their glass cases. Irrigators were being emptied, sponges recounted and checked off on written lists.

In the midst of the confusion, Wilson stood giving last orders to the interne at his elbow. As he talked

he scoured his hands and arms with a small brush; bits of lather flew off on to the tiled floor. His speech was incisive, vigorous. At the hospital they said his nerves were iron; there was no let-down after the day's work. The internes worshiped and feared him. He was just, but without mercy. To be able to work like that, so certainly, with so sure a touch, and to look like a Greek god! Wilson's only rival, a gynecologist named O'Hara, got results, too; but he sweated and swore through his operations, was not too careful as to asepsis, and looked like a gorilla.

The day had been a hard one. The operating-room nurses were fagged. Two or three probationers had been sent to help clean up, and a senior nurse. Wilson's eyes caught the nurse's eyes as she passed him.

"Here, too, Miss Harrison!" he said gayly. "Have they set you on my trail?"

With the eyes of the room on her, the girl answered primly: —

"I'm to be in your office in the mornings, Dr. Wilson, and anywhere I am needed in the afternoons."

"And your vacation?"

"I shall take it when Miss Simpson comes back."

Although he went on at once with his conversation with the interne, he still heard the click of her heels about the room. He had not lost the fact that she had flushed when he spoke to her. The mischief that was latent in him came to the surface. When

he had rinsed his hands, he followed her, carrying the towel to where she stood talking to the superintendent of the training-school.

"Thanks very much, Miss Gregg," he said. "Everything went off nicely."

"I was sorry about that catgut. We have no trouble with what we prepare ourselves. But with so many operations —"

He was in a magnanimous mood. He smiled at Miss Gregg, who was elderly and gray, but visibly his creature.

"That's all right. It's the first time, and of course it will be the last."

"The sponge list, doctor."

He glanced over it, noting accurately sponges prepared, used, turned in. But he missed no gesture of the girl who stood beside Miss Gregg.

"All right." He returned the list. "That was a mighty pretty probationer I brought you yesterday."

Two small frowning lines appeared between Miss Harrison's dark brows. He caught them, caught her somber eyes too, and was amused and rather stimulated.

"She is very young."

"Prefer 'em young," said Dr. Max. "Willing to learn at that age. You'll have to watch her, though. You'll have all the internes buzzing around, neglecting business."

Miss Gregg rather fluttered. She was divided between her disapproval of internes at all times and of

young probationers generally, and her allegiance to the brilliant surgeon whose word was rapidly becoming law in the hospital. When an emergency of the cleaning up called her away, doubt still in her eyes, Wilson was left alone with Miss Harrison.

"Tired?" He adopted the gentle, almost tender tone that made most women his slaves.

"A little. It is warm."

"What are you going to do this evening? Any lectures?"

"Lectures are over for the summer. I shall go to prayers, and after that to the roof for air."

There was a note of bitterness in her voice. Under the eyes of the other nurses, she was carefully contained. They might have been outlining the morning's work at his office.

"The hand lotion, please."

She brought it obediently and poured it into his cupped hands. The solutions of the operating-room played havoc with the skin: the surgeons, and especially Wilson, soaked their hands plentifully with a healing lotion.

Over the bottle their eyes met again, and this time the girl smiled faintly.

"Can't you take a little ride to-night and cool off? I'll have the car wherever you say. A ride and some supper — how does it sound? You could get away at seven — "

" Miss Gregg is coming!"

With an impassive face, the girl took the bottle

away. The workers of the operating-room surged between them. An interne presented an order-book; moppers had come in and waited to clean the tiled floor. There seemed no chance for Wilson to speak to Miss Harrison again.

But he was clever with the guile of the pursuing male. Eyes of all on him, he turned at the door of the wardrobe-room, where he would exchange his white garments for street clothing, and spoke to her over the heads of a dozen nurses.

"That patient's address that I had forgotten, Miss Harrison, is the corner of the Park and Ellington Avenue."

"Thank you."

She played the game well, was quite calm. He admired her coolness. Certainly she was pretty, and certainly, too, she was interested in him. The hurt to his pride of a few nights before was healed. He went whistling into the wardrobe-room. As he turned he caught the interne's eye, and there passed between them a glance of complete comprehension. The interne grinned.

The room was not empty. His brother was there, listening to the comments of O'Hara, his friendly rival.

"Good work, boy!" said O'Hara, and clapped a hairy hand on his shoulder. "That last case was a wonder. I'm proud of you, and your brother here is indecently exalted. It was the Edwardes method, was n't it? I saw it done at his clinic in New York."

"Glad you liked it. Yes. Edwardes was a pal of mine in Berlin. A great surgeon, too, poor old chap!"

"There aren't three men in the country with the nerve and the hand for it."

O'Hara went out, glowing with his own magnanimity. Deep in his heart was a gnawing of envy — not for himself, but for his work. These young fellows with no family ties, who could run over to Europe and bring back anything new that was worth while, they had it all over the older men. Not that he would have changed things. God forbid!

Dr. Ed stood by and waited while his brother got into his street clothes. He was rather silent. There were many times when he wished that their mother could have lived to see how he had carried out his promise to "make a man of Max." This was one of them. Not that he took any credit for Max's brilliant career — but he would have liked her to know that things were going well. He had a picture of her over his office desk. Sometimes he wondered what she would think of his own untidy methods compared with Max's extravagant order — of the bag, for instance, with the dog's collar in it, and other things. On these occasions he always determined to clear out the bag.

"I guess I'll be getting along," he said. "Will you be home to dinner?"

"I think not. I'll — I'm going to run out of town, and eat where it's cool."

The Street was notoriously hot in summer. When

Dr. Max was newly home from Europe, and Dr. Ed was selling a painfully acquired bond or two to furnish the new offices downtown, the brothers had occasionally gone together, by way of the trolley, to the White Springs Hotel for supper. Those had been gala days for the older man. To hear names that he had read with awe, and mispronounced, most of his life, roll off Max's tongue — "Old Steinmetz" and "that ass of a Heydenreich"; to hear the medical and surgical gossip of the Continent, new drugs, new technique, the small heart-burnings of the clinics, student scandal — had brought into his drab days a touch of color. But that was over now. Max had new friends, new social obligations; his time was taken up. And pride would not allow the older brother to show how he missed the early days.

Forty-two he was, and, what with sleepless nights and twenty years of hurried food, he looked fifty. Fifty, then, to Max's thirty.

"There's a roast of beef. It's a pity to cook a roast for one."

Wasteful, too, this cooking of food for two and only one to eat it. A roast of beef meant a visit, in Dr. Ed's modest-paying clientèle. He still paid the expenses of the house on the Street.

"Sorry, old man; I've made another arrangement."

They left the hospital together. Everywhere the younger man received the homage of success. The elevator-man bowed and flung the doors open, with

a smile; the pharmacy clerk, the doorkeeper, even the convalescent patient who was polishing the great brass doorplate, tendered their tribute. Dr. Ed looked neither to right nor left.

At the machine they separated. But Dr. Ed stood for a moment with his hand on the car.

"I was thinking, up there this afternoon," he said slowly, "that I'm not sure I want Sidney Page to become a nurse."

"Why?"

"There's a good deal in life that a girl need not know — not, at least, until her husband tells her. Sidney's been guarded, and it's bound to be a shock."

"It's her own choice."

"Exactly. A child reaches out for the fire."

The motor had started. For the moment, at least, the younger Wilson had no interest in Sidney Page.

"She'll manage all right. Plenty of other girls have taken the training and come through without spoiling their zest for life."

Already, as the car moved off, his mind was on his appointment for the evening.

Sidney, after her involuntary bath in the river, had gone into temporary eclipse at the White Springs Hotel. In the oven of the kitchen stove sat her two small white shoes, stuffed with paper so that they might dry in shape. Back in a detached laundry,

a sympathetic maid was ironing various soft white garments, and singing as she worked.

Sidney sat in a rocking-chair in a hot bedroom. She was carefully swathed in a sheet from neck to toes, except for her arms, and she was being as philosophic as possible. After all, it was a good chance to think things over. She had very little time to think, generally.

She meant to give up Joe Drummond. She did n't want to hurt him. Well, there was that to think over, and a matter of probation dresses to be talked over later with her Aunt Harriet. Also, there was a great deal of advice to K. Le Moyne, who was ridiculously extravagant, before trusting the house to him. She folded her white arms and prepared to think over all these things. As a matter of fact, she went mentally, like an arrow to its mark, to the younger Wilson — to his straight figure in its white coat, to his dark eyes and heavy hair, to the cleft in his chin when he smiled.

"You know, I have always been more than half in love with you myself . . ."

Some one tapped lightly at the door. She was back again in the stuffy hotel room, clutching the sheet about her.

"Yes?"

"It's Le Moyne. Are you all right?"

"Perfectly. How stupid it must be for you!"

"I'm doing very well. The maid will soon be ready. What shall I order for supper?"

"Anything. I'm starving."

Whatever visions K. Le Moyne may have had of a chill or of a feverish cold were dispelled by that.

"The moon has arrived, as per specifications. Shall we eat on the terrace?"

"I have never eaten on a terrace in my life. I'd love it."

"I think your shoes have shrunk."

"Flatterer!" She laughed. "Go away and order supper. And I can see fresh lettuce. Shall we have a salad?"

K. Le Moyne assured her through the door that he would order a salad, and prepared to descend.

But he stood for a moment in front of the closed door, for the mere sound of her moving, beyond it. Things had gone very far with the Pages' roomer that day in the country; not so far as they were to go, but far enough to let him see on the brink of what misery he stood.

He could not go away. He had promised her to stay: he was needed. He thought he could have endured seeing her marry Joe, had she cared for the boy. That way, at least, lay safety for her. The boy had fidelity and devotion written large over him. But this new complication — her romantic interest in Wilson, the surgeon's reciprocal interest in her, with what he knew of the man — made him quail.

From the top of the narrow staircase to the foot, and he had lived a year's torment! At the foot, how-

ever, he was startled out of his reverie. Joe Drummond stood there waiting for him, his blue eyes recklessly alight.

"You — you dog!" said Joe.

There were people in the hotel parlor. Le Moyne took the frenzied boy by the elbow and led him past the door to the empty porch.

"Now," he said, "if you will keep your voice down, I'll listen to what you have to say."

"You know what I've got to say."

This failing to draw from K. Le Moyne anything but his steady glance, Joe jerked his arm free and clenched his fist.

"What did you bring her out here for?"

"I do not know that I owe you any explanation, but I am willing to give you one. I brought her out here for a trolley ride and a picnic luncheon. Incidentally we brought the ground squirrel out and set him free."

He was sorry for the boy. Life not having been all beer and skittles to him, he knew that Joe was suffering, and was marvelously patient with him.

"Where is she now?"

"She had the misfortune to fall in the river. She is upstairs." And, seeing the light of unbelief in Joe's eyes: "If you care to make a tour of investigation, you will find that I am entirely truthful. In the laundry a maid —"

"She is engaged to me" — doggedly. "Everybody in the neighborhood knows it, and yet you

bring her out here for a picnic! It's — it's damned rotten treatment."

His fist had unclenched. Before K. Le Moyne's eyes his own fell. He felt suddenly young and futile; his just rage turned to blustering in his ears.

"Now, be honest with yourself. Is there really an engagement?"

"Yes," doggedly.

"Even in that case, is n't it rather arrogant to say that — that the young lady in question can accept no ordinary friendly attentions from another man?"

Utter astonishment left Joe almost speechless. The Street, of course, regarded an engagement as a setting aside of the affianced couple, an isolation of two, than which marriage itself was not more a solitude *à deux*. After a moment: —

"I don't know where you came from," he said, "but around here decent men cut out when a girl's engaged."

"I see!"

"What's more, what do we know about you? Who are you, anyhow? I've looked you up. Even at your office they don't know anything. You may be all right, but how do I know it? And, even if you are, renting a room in the Page house does n't entitle you to interfere with the family. You get her into trouble and I'll kill you!"

It took courage, that speech, with K. Le Moyne towering five inches above him and growing a little white about the lips.

"Are you going to say all these things to Sidney?"

"Does she allow you to call her Sidney?"

"Are you?"

"I am. And I am going to find out why you were upstairs just now."

Perhaps never in his twenty-two years had young Drummond been so near a thrashing. Fury that he was ashamed of shook Le Moyne. For very fear of himself, he thrust his hands in the pockets of his Norfolk coat.

"Very well," he said. "You go to her with just one of these ugly insinuations, and I'll take mighty good care that you are sorry for it. I don't care to threaten. You're younger than I am, and lighter. But if you are going to behave like a bad child, you deserve a licking, and I'll give it to you."

An overflow from the parlor poured out on the porch. Le Moyne had got himself in hand somewhat. He was still angry, but the look in Joe's eyes startled him. He put a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You're wrong, old man," he said. "You're insulting the girl you care for by the things you are thinking. And, if it's any comfort to you, I have no intention of interfering in any way. You can count me out. It's between you and her."

Joe picked his straw hat from a chair and stood turning it in his hands.

"Even if you don't care for her, how do I know she is n't crazy about you?"

"My word of honor, she is n't."

"She sends you notes to McKees'."

"Just to clear the air, I'll show it to you. It's no breach of confidence. It's about the hospital."

Into the breast pocket of his coat he dived and brought up a wallet. The wallet had had a name on it in gilt letters that had been carefully scraped off. But Joe did not wait to see the note.

"Oh, damn the hospital!" he said — and went swiftly down the steps and into the gathering twilight of the June night.

It was only when he reached the street-car, and sat huddled in a corner, that he remembered something.

Only about the hospital — but Le Moyne had kept the note, treasured it! Joe was not subtle, not even clever; but he was a lover, and he knew the ways of love. The Pages' roomer was in love with Sidney, whether he knew it or not.

CHAPTER VII

CARLOTTA HARRISON pleaded a headache, and was excused from the operating-room and from prayers.

"I'm sorry about the vacation," Miss Gregg said kindly, "but in a day or two I can let you off. Go out now and get a little air."

The girl managed to dissemble the triumph in her eyes.

"Thank you," she said languidly, and turned away. Then: "About the vacation, I am not in a hurry. If Miss Simpson needs a few days to straighten things out, I can stay on with Dr. Wilson."

Young women on the eve of a vacation were not usually so reasonable. Miss Gregg was grateful.

"She will probably need a week. Thank you. I wish more of the girls were as thoughtful, with the house full and operations all day and every day."

Outside the door of the anæsthetizing-room Miss Harrison's languor vanished. She sped along corridors and up the stairs, not waiting for the deliberate elevator. Inside of her room, she closed and bolted the door, and, standing before her mirror, gazed long at her dark eyes and bright hair. Then she proceeded briskly with her dressing.

Carlotta Harrison was not a child. Though she

was only three years older than Sidney, her experience of life was as of three to Sidney's one. The product of a curious marriage, — when Tommy Harrison of Harrison's Minstrels, touring Spain with his troupe, had met the pretty daughter of a Spanish shopkeeper and eloped with her, — she had certain qualities of both, a Yankee shrewdness and capacity that made her a capable nurse, complicated by occasional outcroppings of southern Europe, furious bursts of temper, slow and smouldering vindictiveness. A passionate creature, in reality, smothered under hereditary Massachusetts caution.

She was well aware of the risks of the evening's adventure. The only dread she had was of the discovery of her escapade by the hospital authorities. Lines were sharply drawn. Nurses were forbidden more than the exchange of professional conversation with the staff. In that world of her choosing, of hard work and little play, of service and self-denial and vigorous rules of conduct, discovery meant dismissal.

She put on a soft black dress, open at the throat, and with a wide white collar and cuffs of some sheer material. Her yellow hair was drawn high under her low black hat. From her Spanish mother she had learned to please the man, not herself. She guessed that Dr. Max would wish her to be inconspicuous, and she dressed accordingly. Then, being a cautious person, she disarranged her bed slightly and thumped a hollow into her pillow. The nurses'

rooms were subject to inspection, and she had pleaded a headache.

She was exactly on time. Dr. Max, driving up to the corner five minutes late, found her there, quite matter-of-fact but exceedingly handsome, and acknowledged the evening's adventure much to his taste.

"A little air first, and then supper — how's that?"

"Air first, please. I'm very tired."

He turned the car toward the suburbs, and then, bending toward her, smiled into her eyes.

"Well, this is life!"

"I'm cool for the first time to-day."

After that they spoke very little. Even Wilson's superb nerves had felt the strain of the afternoon, and under the girl's dark eyes were purplish shadows. She leaned back, weary but luxuriously content.

Once he turned and looked down at her.

"Not uneasy, are you?"

"Not particularly. I'm too comfortable. But I hope we're not seen."

"Even if we are, why not? You are going with me to a case. I've driven Miss Simpson about a lot."

It was almost eight when he turned the car into the drive of the White Springs Hotel. The six-to-eight supper was almost over. One or two motor parties were preparing for the moonlight drive back to the city. All around was virgin country, sweet with early summer odors of new-cut grass, of blos-

soming trees and warm earth. On the grass terrace over the valley, where ran Sidney's unlucky river, was a magnolia full of creamy blossoms among waxed leaves. Its silhouette against the sky was quaintly heart-shaped.

Under her mask of languor, Carlotta's heart was beating wildly. What an adventure! What a night! Let him lose his head a little; she could keep hers. If she were skillful and played things right, who could tell? To marry him, to leave behind the drudgery of the hospital, to feel safe as she had not felt for years, that was a stroke to play for!

The magnolia was just beside her. She reached up and, breaking off one of the heavy-scented flowers, placed it in the bosom of her black dress.

Sidney and K. Le Moyne were dining together. The novelty of the experience had made her eyes shine like stars. She saw only the magnolia tree shaped like a heart, the terrace edged with low shrubbery, and beyond the faint gleam that was the river. For her the dish-washing clatter of the kitchen was stilled, the noises from the bar were lost in the ripple of the river; the scent of the grass killed the odor of stale beer that wafted out through the open windows. The unshaded glare of the lights behind her in the house was eclipsed by the crescent edge of the rising moon. Dinner was over. Sidney was experiencing the rare treat of after-dinner coffee.

Le Moyne, grave and contained, sat across from

ner. To give so much pleasure, and so easily! How young she was, and radiant! No wonder the boy was mad about her. She fairly held out her arms to life.

Ah, that was too bad! Another table was being brought; they were not to be alone. But what roused in him violent resentment only appealed to Sidney's curiosity.

"Two places!" she commented. "Lovers, of course. Or perhaps honeymooners."

K. tried to fall into her mood.

"A box of candy against a good cigar, they are a stolid married couple."

"How shall we know?"

"That's easy. If they loll back and watch the kitchen door, I win. If they lean forward, elbows on the table, and talk, you get the candy."

Sidney, who had been leaning forward, talking eagerly over the table, suddenly straightened and flushed.

Carlotta Harrison came out alone. Although the tapping of her heels was dulled by the grass, although she had exchanged her cap for the black hat, Sidney knew her at once. A sort of thrill ran over her. It was the pretty nurse from Dr. Wilson's office. Was it possible — but of course not! The book of rules stated explicitly that such things were forbidden.

"Don't turn around," she said swiftly. "It is the Miss Harrison I told you about. She is looking at us."

Carlotta's eyes were blinded for a moment by the glare of the house lights. She dropped into her chair, with a flash of resentment at the proximity of the other table. She languidly surveyed its two occupants. Then she sat up, her eyes on Le Moyne's grave profile turned toward the valley.

Lucky for her that Wilson had stopped in the bar, that Sidney's instinctive good manners forbade her staring, that only the edge of the summer moon shone through the trees. She went white and clutched the edge of the table, with her eyes closed. That gave her quick brain a chance. It was madness, June madness. She was always seeing him, even in her dreams. This man was older, much older. She looked again.

She had not been mistaken. Here, and after all these months! K. Le Moyne, quite unconscious of her presence, looked down into the valley.

Wilson appeared on the wooden porch above the terrace, and stood, his eyes searching the half light for her. If he came down to her, the man at the next table might turn, would see her —

She rose and went swiftly back toward the hotel. All the gayety was gone out of the evening for her, but she forced a lightness she did not feel: —

"It is so dark and depressing out there — it makes me sad."

"Surely you do not want to dine in the house?"

"Do you mind?"

"Just as you wish. This is your evening."

But he was not pleased. The prospect of the glaring lights and soiled linen of the dining-room jarred on his æsthetic sense. He wanted a setting for himself, for the girl. Environment was vital to him. But when, in the full light of the moon, he saw the purplish shadows under her eyes, he forgot his resentment. She had had a hard day. She was tired. His easy sympathies were roused. He leaned over and ran his hand caressingly along her bare forearm.

"Your wish is my law — to-night," he said softly.

After all, the evening was a disappointment to him. The spontaneity had gone out of it, for some reason. The girl who had thrilled to his glance those two mornings in his office, whose somber eyes had met his, fire for fire, across the operating-room, was not playing up. She sat back in her chair, eating little, starting at every step. Her eyes, which by every rule of the game should have been gazing into his, were fixed on the oilcloth-covered passage outside the door.

"I think, after all, you are frightened!"

"Terribly."

"A little danger adds to the zest of things. You know what Nietzsche says about that."

"I am not fond of Nietzsche." Then, with an effort: "What does he say?"

" 'Two things are wanted by the true man — danger and play. Therefore he seeketh woman as the most dangerous of toys.' "

"Women are dangerous only when you think of

them as toys. When a man finds that a woman can reason, — do anything but feel, — he regards her as a menace. But the reasoning woman is really less dangerous than the other sort."

This was more like the real thing. To talk careful abstractions like this, with beneath each abstraction its concealed personal application, to talk of woman and look in her eyes, to discuss new philosophies with their freedoms, to discard old creeds and old moralities — that was his game. Wilson became content, interested again. The girl was nimble-minded. She challenged his philosophy and gave him a chance to defend it. With the conviction, as their meal went on, that Le Moyne and his companion must surely have gone, she gained ease.

It was only by wild driving that she got back to the hospital by ten o'clock.

Wilson left her at the corner, well content with himself. He had had the rest he needed in congenial company. The girl stimulated his interest. She was mental, but not too mental. And he approved of his own attitude. He had been discreet. Even if she talked, there was nothing to tell. But he felt confident that she would not talk.

As he drove up the Street, he glanced across at the Page house. Sidney was there on the doorstep, talking to a tall man who stood below and looked up at her. Wilson settled his tie, in the darkness. Sidney was a mighty pretty girl. The June night was in his blood. He was sorry he had not kissed Car-

lotta good-night. He rather thought, now he looked back, she had expected it.

As he got out of his car at the curb a young man who had been standing in the shadow of the tree-box moved quickly away.

Wilson smiled after him in the darkness.

"That you, Joe?" he called.

But the boy went on.

CHAPTER VIII

SIDNEY entered the hospital as a probationer early in August. Christine was to be married in September to Palmer Howe, and, with Harriet and K. in the house, she felt that she could safely leave her mother.

The balcony outside the parlor was already under way. On the night before she went away, Sidney took chairs out there and sat with her mother until the dew drove Anna to the lamp in the sewing-room and her "Daily Thoughts" reading.

Sidney sat alone and viewed her world from this new and pleasant angle. She could see the garden and the whitewashed fence with its morning-glories, and at the same time, by turning her head, view the Wilson house across the Street. She looked mostly at the Wilson house.

K. Le Moyne was upstairs in his room. She could hear him tramping up and down, and catch, occasionally, the bitter-sweet odor of his old brier pipe.

All the small loose ends of her life were gathered up — except Joe. She would have liked to get that clear, too. She wanted him to know how she felt about it all: that she liked him as much as ever, that she did not want to hurt him. But she wanted to

make it clear, too, that she knew now that she would never marry him. She thought she would never marry; but, if she did, it would be a man doing a man's work in the world. Her eyes turned wistfully to the house across the Street.

K.'s lamp still burned overhead, but his restless tramping about had ceased. He must be reading — he read a great deal. She really ought to go to bed. A neighborhood cat came stealthily across the Street, and stared up at the little balcony with green-glowing eyes.

"Come on, Bill Taft," she said. "Reginald is gone, so you are welcome. Come on."

Joe Drummond, passing the house for the fourth time that evening, heard her voice, and hesitated uncertainly on the pavement.

"That you, Sid?" he called softly.

"Joe! Come in."

"It's late; I'd better get home."

The misery in his voice hurt her.

"I'll not keep you long. I want to talk to you."

He came slowly toward her.

"Well?" he said hoarsely.

"You're not very kind to me, Joe."

"My God!" said poor Joe. "Kind to you! Is n't the kindest thing I can do to keep out of your way?"

"Not if you are hating me all the time."

"I don't hate you."

"Then why have n't you been to see me? If I

have done anything —" Her voice was a-tingle with virtue and outraged friendship.

"You have n't done anything but — show me where I get off."

He sat down on the edge of the balcony and stared out blankly.

"If that's the way you feel about it —"

"I'm not blaming you. I was a fool to think you'd ever care about me. I don't know that I feel so bad — about the thing. I've been around seeing some other girls, and I notice they're glad to see me, and treat me right, too." There was boyish bravado in his voice. "But what makes me sick is to have every one saying you've jilted me."

"Good gracious! Why, Joe, I never promised."

"Well, we look at it in different ways; that's all. I took it for a promise."

Then suddenly all his carefully conserved indifference fled. He bent forward quickly and, catching her hand, held it against his lips.

"I'm crazy about you, Sidney. That's the truth I wish I could die!"

The cat, finding no active antagonism, sprang up on the balcony and rubbed against the boy's quivering shoulders; a breath of air stroked the morning-glory vine like the touch of a friendly hand. Sidney, facing for the first time the enigma of love and despair sat, rather frightened, in her chair.

"You don't mean that!"

"I mean it, all right. If it was n't for the folks,

I'd jump in the river. I lied when I said I'd been to see other girls. What do I want with other girls? I want you!"

"I'm not worth all that."

"No girl's worth what I've been going through," he retorted bitterly. "But that does n't help any. I don't eat; I don't sleep — I'm afraid sometimes of the way I feel. When I saw you at the White Springs with that roomer chap —"

"Ah! You were there!"

"If I'd had a gun I'd have killed him. I thought —"

So far, out of sheer pity, she had left her hand in his. Now she drew it away.

"This is wild, silly talk. You'll be sorry to-morrow."

"It's the truth," doggedly.

But he made a clutch at his self-respect. He was acting like a crazy boy, and he was a man, all of twenty-two!

"When are you going to the hospital?"

"To-morrow."

"Is that Wilson's hospital?"

"Yes."

Alas for his resolve! The red haze of jealousy came again. "You'll be seeing him every day, I suppose."

"I dare say. I shall also be seeing twenty or thirty other doctors, and a hundred or so men patients, not to mention visitors. Joe, you're not rational."

"No," he said heavily, "I'm not. If it's got to be some one, Sidney, I'd rather have it the roomer upstairs than Wilson. There's a lot of talk about Wilson."

"It is n't necessary to malign my friends."

He rose.

"I thought perhaps, since you are going away, you would let me keep Reginald. He'd be something to remember you by."

"One would think I was about to die! I set Reginald free that day in the country. I'm sorry, Joe. You'll come to see me now and then, won't you?"

"If I do, do you think you may change your mind?"

"I'm afraid not."

"I've got to fight this out alone, and the less I see of you the better." But his next words belied his intention. "And Wilson had better look out. I'll be watching. If I see him playing any of his tricks around you — well, he'd better look out!"

That, as it turned out, was Joe's farewell. He had reached the breaking-point. He gave her a long look, blinked, and walked rapidly out to the Street. Some of the dignity of his retreat was lost by the fact that the cat followed him, close at his heels.

Sidney was hurt, greatly troubled. If this was love, she did not want it — this strange compound of suspicion and despair, injured pride and threats. Lovers in fiction were of two classes — the accepted ones, who loved and trusted, and the rejected ones,

who took themselves away in despair, but at least took themselves away. The thought of a future with Joe always around a corner, watching her, obsessed her. She felt aggrieved, insulted. She even shed a tear or two, very surreptitiously; and then, being human and much upset, and the cat startling her by its sudden return and selfish advances, she shooed it off the veranda and set an imaginary dog after it. Whereupon, feeling somewhat better, she went in and locked the balcony window and proceeded upstairs.

Le Moyne's light was still going. The rest of the household slept. She paused outside the door.

"Are you sleepy?" — very softly.

There was a movement inside, the sound of a book put down. Then: "No, indeed."

"I may not see you in the morning. I leave tomorrow."

"Just a minute."

From the sounds, she judged that he was putting on his shabby gray coat. The next moment he had opened the door and stepped out into the corridor.

"I believe you had forgotten!"

"I? Certainly not. I started downstairs a while ago, but you had a visitor."

"Only Joe Drummond."

He gazed down at her quizzically.

"And — is Joe more reasonable?"

"He will be. He knows now that I — that I shall not marry him."

"Poor chap! He'll buck up, of course. But it's a little hard just now."

"I believe you think I should have married him."

"I am only putting myself in his place and realizing — When do you leave?"

"Just after breakfast."

"I am going very early. Perhaps — "

He hesitated. Then, hurriedly: —

"I got a little present for you — nothing much, but your mother was quite willing. In fact, we bought it together."

He went back into his room, and returned with a small box.

"With all sorts of good luck," he said, and placed it in her hands.

"How dear of you! And may I look now?"

"I wish you would. Because, if you would rather have something else — "

She opened the box with excited fingers. Ticking away on its satin bed was a small gold watch.

"You'll need it, you see," he explained nervously. "It was n't extravagant under the circumstances. Your mother's watch, which you had intended to take, had no second-hand. You'll need a second-hand to take pulses, you know."

"A watch," said Sidney, eyes on it. "A dear little watch, to pin on and not put in a pocket. Why, you're the best person!"

"I was afraid you might think it presumptuous," he said. "I have n't any right, of course. I thought of flowers — but they fade and what have you? You said that, you know, about Joe's roses. And then, your mother said you would n't be offended —"

"Don't apologize for making me so happy!" she cried. "It's wonderful, really. And the little hand is for pulses! How many queer things you know!"

After that she must pin it on, and slip in to stand before his mirror and inspect the result. It gave Le Moyne a queer thrill to see her there in the room, among his books and his pipes. It made him a little sick, too, in view of to-morrow and the thousand-odd to-morrows when she would not be there.

"I've kept you up shamefully," she said at last, "and you get up so early. I shall write you a note from the hospital, delivering a little lecture on extravagance — because how can I now, with this joy shining on me? And about how to keep Katie in order about your socks, and all sorts of things. And — and now, good-night."

She had moved to the door, and he followed her, stooping a little to pass under the low chandelier.

"Good-night," said Sidney.

"Good-bye — and God bless you."

She went out, and he closed the door softly behind her.

CHAPTER IX

SIDNEY never forgot her early impressions of the hospital, although they were chaotic enough at first. There were uniformed young women coming and going, efficient, cool-eyed, low of voice. There were medicine-closets with orderly rows of labeled bottles, linen-rooms with great stacks of sheets and towels, long vistas of shining floors and lines of beds. There were brisk internes with duck clothes and brass buttons, who eyed her with friendly, patronizing glances. There were bandages and dressings, and great white screens behind which were played little or big dramas, baths or deaths, as the case might be. And over all brooded the mysterious authority of the superintendent of the training-school, dubbed the Head, for short.

Twelve hours a day, from seven to seven, with the off-duty intermission, Sidney labored at tasks which revolted her soul. She swept and dusted the wards, cleaned closets, folded sheets and towels, rolled bandages — did everything but nurse the sick, which was what she had come to do.

At night she did not go home. She sat on the edge of her narrow white bed and soaked her aching feet in hot water and witch hazel, and practiced taking pulses on her own slender wrist, with K.'s little watch.

Out of all the long, hot days, two periods stood out clearly, to be waited for and cherished. One was when, early in the afternoon, with the ward in spotless order, the shades drawn against the August sun, the tables covered with their red covers, and the only sound the drone of the bandage-machine as Sidney steadily turned it, Dr. Max passed the door on his way to the surgical ward beyond, and gave her a cheery greeting. At these times Sidney's heart beat almost in time with the ticking of the little watch.

The other hour was at twilight, when, work over for the day, the night nurse, with her rubber-soled shoes and tired eyes and jangling keys, having reported and received the night orders, the nurses gathered in their small parlor for prayers. It was months before Sidney got over the exaltation of that twilight hour, and never did it cease to bring her healing and peace. In a way, it crystallized for her what the day's work meant: charity and its sister, service, the promise of rest and peace. Into the little parlor filed the nurses, and knelt, folding their tired hands.

"The Lord is my shepherd," read the Head out of her worn Bible; "I shall not want."

And the nurses: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

And so on through the psalm to the assurance at the end, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Now and then there was a death behind one of the white screens. It caused little change in the routine of the ward. A nurse stayed behind the screen, and her work was done by the others. When everything was over, the time was recorded exactly on the record, and the body was taken away.

At first it seemed to Sidney that she could not stand this nearness to death. She thought the nurses hard because they took it quietly. Then she found that it was only stoicism, resignation, that they had learned. These things must be, and the work must go on. Their philosophy made them no less tender. Some such patient detachment must be that of the angels who keep the Great Record.

On her first Sunday half-holiday she was free in the morning, and went to church with her mother, going back to the hospital after the service. So it was two weeks before she saw Le Moyne again. Even then, it was only for a short time. Christine and Palmer Howe came in to see her, and to inspect the balcony, now finished.

But Sidney and Le Moyne had a few words together first.

There was a change in Sidney. Le Moyne was quick to see it. She was a trifle subdued, with a puzzled look in her blue eyes. Her mouth was tender, as always, but he thought it drooped. There was a new atmosphere of wistfulness about the girl that made his heart ache.

They were alone in the little parlor with its brown lamp and blue silk shade, and its small nude Eve — which Anna kept because it had been a gift from her husband, but retired behind a photograph of the minister, so that only the head and a bare arm holding the apple appeared above the reverend gentleman.

K. never smoked in the parlor, but by sheer force of habit he held the pipe in his teeth.

"And how have things been going?" asked Sidney practically.

"Your steward has little to report. Aunt Harriet, who left you her love, has had the complete order for the Lorenz trousseau. She and I have picked out a stunning design for the wedding dress. I thought I'd ask you about the veil. We're rather in a quandary. Do you like this new fashion of draping the veil from behind the coiffure in the back —"

Sidney had been sitting on the edge of her chair, staring.

"There," she said — "I knew it! This house is fatal! They're making an old woman of you already." Her tone was tragic.

"Miss Lorenz likes the new method, but my personal preference is for the old way, with the bride's face covered."

He sucked calmly at his dead pipe.

"Katie has a new prescription — recipe — for bread. It has more bread and fewer air-holes. One cake of yeast —"

Sidney sprang to her feet.

"It's perfectly terrible!" she cried. "Because you rent a room in this house is no reason why you should give up your personality and your — your intelligence. Not but that it's good for you. But Katie has made bread without masculine assistance for a good many years, and if Christine can't decide about her own veil she'd better not get married. Mother says you water the flowers every evening, and lock up the house before you go to bed. I — I never meant you to adopt the family!"

K. removed his pipe and gazed earnestly into the bowl.

"Bill Taft has had kittens under the porch," he said. "And the groceryman has been sending short weight. We've bought scales now, and weigh everything."

"You are evading the question."

"Dear child, I am doing these things because I like to do them. For — for some time I've been floating, and now I've got a home. Every time I lock up the windows at night, or cut a picture out of a magazine as a suggestion to your Aunt Harriet, it's an anchor to windward."

Sidney gazed helplessly at his imperturbable face. He seemed older than she had recalled him: the hair over his ears was almost white. And yet, he was just thirty. That was Palmer Howe's age, and Palmer seemed like a boy. But he held himself more

erect than he had in the first days of his occupancy of the second-floor front.

"And now," he said cheerfully, "what about yourself? You've lost a lot of illusions, of course, but perhaps you've gained ideals. That's a step."

"Life," observed Sidney, with the wisdom of two weeks out in the world, "life is a terrible thing, K. We think we've got it, and — it's got us."

"Undoubtedly."

"When I think of how simple I used to think it all was! One grew up and got married, and — and perhaps had children. And when one got very old, one died. Lately, I've been seeing that life really consists of exceptions — children who don't grow up, and grown-ups who die before they are old. And" — this took an effort, but she looked at him squarely — "and people who have children, but are not married. It all rather hurts."

"All knowledge that is worth while hurts in the getting."

Sidney got up and wandered around the room, touching its little familiar objects with tender hands. K. watched her. There was this curious element in his love for her, that when he was with her it took on the guise of friendship and deceived even himself. It was only in the lonely hours that it took on truth, became a hopeless yearning for the touch of her hand or a glance from her clear eyes.

Sidney, having picked up the minister's picture,

replaced it absently, so that Eve stood revealed in all her pre-apple innocence.

"There is something else," she said absently. "I cannot talk it over with mother. There is a girl in the ward —"

"A patient?"

"Yes. She is quite pretty. She has had typhoid, but she is a little better. She's — not a good person."

"I see."

"At first I could n't bear to go near her. I shivered when I had to straighten her bed. I — I'm being very frank, but I've got to talk this out with some one. I worried a lot about it, because, although at first I hated her, now I don't. I rather like her."

She looked at K. defiantly, but there was no disapproval in his eyes.

"Yes."

"Well, this is the question. She's getting better. She'll be able to go out soon. Don't you think something ought to be done to keep her from — going back?"

There was a shadow in K.'s eyes now. She was so young to face all this; and yet, since face it she must, how much better to have her do it squarely.

"Does she want to change her mode of life?"

"I don't know, of course. There are some things one does n't discuss. She cares a great deal for some man. The other day I propped her up in bed and gave her a newspaper, and after a while I found the paper on the floor, and she was crying. The other

patients avoid her, and it was some time before I noticed it. The next day she told me that the man was going to marry some one else. 'He would n't marry me, of course,' she said; 'but he might have told me.'"

Le Moyne did his best, that afternoon in the little parlor, to provide Sidney with a philosophy to carry her through her training. He told her that certain responsibilities were hers, but that she could not reform the world. Broad charity, tenderness, and healing were her province.

"Help them all you can," he finished, feeling inadequate and hopelessly didactic. "Cure them; send them out with a smile; and — leave the rest to the Almighty."

Sidney was resigned, but not content. Newly facing the evil of the world, she was a rampant reformer at once. Only the arrival of Christine and her fiancé saved his philosophy from complete rout. He had time for a question between the ring of the bell and Katie's deliberate progress from the kitchen to the front door.

"How about the surgeon, young Wilson? Do you ever see him?" His tone was carefully casual.

"Almost every day. He stops at the door of the ward and speaks to me. It makes me quite distinguished, for a probationer. Usually, you know, the staff never even see the probationers."

"And — the glamour persists?" He smiled down at her.

"I think he is very wonderful," said Sidney valiantly.

Christine Lorenz, while not large, seemed to fill the little room. Her voice, which was frequent and penetrating, her smile, which was wide and showed very white teeth that were a trifle large for beauty, her all-embracing good nature, dominated the entire lower floor. K., who had met her before, retired into silence and a corner. Young Howe smoked a cigarette in the hall.

"You poor thing!" said Christine, and put her cheek against Sidney's. "Why, you're positively thin! Palmer gives you a month to tire of it all; but I said —"

"I take that back," Palmer spoke indolently from the corridor. "There is the look of willing martyrdom in her face. Where is Reginald? I've brought some nuts for him."

"Reginald is back in the woods again."

"Now, look here," he said solemnly. "When we arranged about these rooms, there were certain properties that went with them — the lady next door who plays Paderewski's 'Minuet' six hours a day, and K. here, and Reginald. If you must take something to the woods, why not the minuet person?"

Howe was a good-looking man, thin, smooth-shaven, aggressively well dressed. This Sunday afternoon, in a cutaway coat and high hat, with an English malacca stick, he was just a little out of

the picture. The Street said that he was "wild," and that to get into the Country Club set Christine was losing more than she was gaining.

Christine had stepped out on the balcony, and was speaking to K. just inside.

"It's rather a queer way to live, of course," she said. "But Palmer is a pauper, practically. We are going to take our meals at home for a while. You see, certain things that we want we can't have if we take a house — a car, for instance. We'll need one for running out to the Country Club to dinner. Of course, unless father gives me one for a wedding present, it will be a cheap one. And we're getting the Rosenfeld boy to drive it. He's crazy about machinery, and he'll come for practically nothing."

K. had never known a married couple to take two rooms and go to the bride's mother's for meals in order to keep a car. He looked faintly dazed. Also, certain sophistries of his former world about a cheap chauffeur being costly in the end rose in his mind and were carefully suppressed.

"You'll find a car a great comfort, I'm sure," he said politely.

Christine considered K. rather distinguished. She liked his graying hair and steady eyes, and insisted on considering his shabbiness a pose. She was conscious that she made a pretty picture in the French window, and preened herself like a bright bird.

"You'll come out with us now and then, I hope "

"Thank you."

"Is n't it odd to think that we are going to be practically one family!"

"Odd, but very pleasant."

He caught the flash of Christine's smile, and smiled back. Christine was glad she had decided to take the rooms, glad that K. lived there. This thing of marriage being the end of all things was absurd. A married woman should have men friends; they kept her up. She would take him to the Country Club. The women would be mad to know him. How clear-cut his profile was!

Across the Street, the Rosenfeld boy had stopped by Dr. Wilson's car, and was eyeing it with the cool, appraising glance of the street boy whose sole knowledge of machinery has been acquired from the clothes-washer at home. Joe Drummond, eyes carefully ahead, went up the Street. Tillie, at Mrs. McKee's, stood in the doorway and fanned herself with her apron. Max Wilson came out of the house and got into his car. For a minute, perhaps, all the actors, save Carlotta and Dr. Ed, were on the stage. It was that *bête noir* of the playwright, an *ensemble;* K. Le Moyne and Sidney, Palmer Howe, Christine, Tillie, the younger Wilson, Joe, even young Rosenfeld, all within speaking distance, almost touching distance, gathered within and about the little house on a side street which K. at first grimly and now tenderly called "home."

CHAPTER X

On Monday morning, shortly after the McKee prolonged breakfast hour was over, a small man of perhaps fifty, with iron-gray hair and a sparse goatee, made his way along the Street. He moved with the air of one having a definite destination but a by no means definite reception.

As he walked along he eyed with a professional glance the ailanthus and maple trees which, with an occasional poplar, lined the Street. At the door of Mrs. McKee's boarding-house he stopped. Owing to a slight change in the grade of the street, the McKee house had no stoop, but one flat doorstep. Thus it was possible to ring the doorbell from the pavement, and this the stranger did. It gave him a curious appearance of being ready to cut and run if things were unfavorable.

For a moment things were indeed unfavorable. Mrs. McKee herself opened the door. She recognized him at once, but no smile met the nervous one that formed itself on the stranger's face.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"It's me, Mrs. McKee."

"Well?"

He made a conciliatory effort.

"I was thinking, as I came along," he said, "that

you and the neighbors had better get after these here caterpillars. Look at them maples, now."

"If you want to see Tillie, she's busy."

"I only want to say how-d 'ye-do. I 'm just on my way through town."

"I'll say it for you."

A certain doggedness took the place of his tentative smile.

"I'll say it myself, I guess. I don't want any unpleasantness, but I've come a good ways to see her and I'll hang around until I do."

Mrs. McKee knew herself routed, and retreated to the kitchen.

"You're wanted out front," she said.

"Who is it?"

"Never mind. Only, my advice to you is, don't be a fool."

Tillie went suddenly pale. The hands with which she tied a white apron over her gingham one were shaking.

Her visitor had accepted the open door as permission to enter and was standing in the hall.

He went rather white himself when he saw Tillie coming toward him down the hall. He knew that for Tillie this visit would mean that he was free—and he was not free. Sheer terror of his errand filled him.

"Well, here I am, Tillie."

"All dressed up and highly perfumed!" said poor Tillie, with the question in her eyes. "You're quite a stranger, Mr. Schwitter."

"I was passing through, and I just thought I'd call around and tell you — My God, Tillie, I'm glad to see you!"

She made no reply, but opened the door into the cool and shaded little parlor. He followed her in and closed the door behind him.

"I could n't help it. I know I promised."

"Then she —?"

"She's still living. Playing with paper dolls — that's the latest."

Tillie sat down suddenly on one of the stiff chairs. Her lips were as white as her face.

"I thought, when I saw you —"

"I was afraid you'd think that."

Neither spoke for a moment. Tillie's hands twisted nervously in her lap. Mr. Schwitter's eyes were fixed on the window, which looked back on the McKee yard.

"That spiræa back there's not looking very good. If you'll save the cigar butts around here and put 'em in water, and spray it, you'll kill the lice."

Tillie found speech at last.

"I don't know why you come around bothering me," she said dully. "I've been getting along all right; now you come and upset everything."

Mr. Schwitter rose and took a step toward her.

"Well, I'll tell you why I came. Look at me. I ain't getting any younger, am I? Time's going on, and I'm wanting you all the time. And what

am I getting? What've I got out of life, anyhow? I'm lonely, Tillie!"

"What's that got to do with me?"

"You're lonely, too, ain't you?"

"Me? I have n't got time to be. And, anyhow, there's always a crowd here."

"You can be lonely in a crowd, and I guess — is there any one around here you like better than me?"

"Oh, what's the use!" cried poor Tillie. "We can talk our heads off and not get anywhere. You've got a wife living, and, unless you intend to do away with her, I guess that's all there is to it."

"Is that all, Tillie? Have n't you got a right to be happy?"

She was quick of wit, and she read his tone as well as his words.

"You get out of here — and get out quick!"

She had jumped to her feet; but he only looked at her with understanding eyes.

"I know," he said. "That's the way I thought of it at first. Maybe I've just got used to the idea, but it does n't seem so bad to me now. Here are you, drudging for other people when you ought to have a place all your own — and not gettin' younger any more than I am. Here's both of us lonely. I'd be a good husband to you, Till — because, whatever it'd be in law, I'd be your husband before God."

Tillie cowered against the door, her eyes on his. Here before her, embodied in this man, stood all that

she had wanted and never had. He meant a home, tenderness, children, perhaps. He turned away from the look in her eyes and stared out of the front window.

"Them poplars out there ought to be taken away," he said heavily. "They're hell on sewers."

Tillie found her voice at last: —

"I could n't do it, Mr. Schwitter. I guess I'm a coward. Maybe I'll be sorry."

"Perhaps, if you got used to the idea —"

"What's that to do with the right and wrong of it?"

"Maybe I'm queer. It don't seem like wrongdoing to me. It seems to me that the Lord would make an exception of us if He knew the circumstances. Perhaps, after you get used to the idea — What I thought was like this. I've got a little farm about seven miles from the city limits, and the tenant on it says that nearly every Sunday somebody motors out from town and wants a chicken-and-waffle supper. There ain't much in the nursery business any more. These landscape fellows buy their stuff direct, and the middleman's out. I've got a good orchard, and there's a spring, so I could put running water in the house. I'd be good to you, Tillie, — I swear it. It'd be just the same as marriage. Nobody need know it."

"You'd know it. You would n't respect me."

"Don't a man respect a woman that's got courage enough to give up everything for him?"

Tillie was crying softly into her apron. He put a work-hardened hand on her head.

"It is n't as if I 'd run around after women," he said. "You 're the only one, since Maggie —" He drew a long breath. "I 'll give you time to think it over. Suppose I stop in to-morrow morning. It does n't commit you to anything to talk it over."

There had been no passion in the interview, and there was none in the touch of his hand. He was not young, and the tragic loneliness of approaching old age confronted him. He was trying to solve his problem and Tillie's, and what he had found was no solution, but a compromise.

"To-morrow morning, then," he said quietly, and went out the door.

All that hot August morning Tillie worked in a daze. Mrs. McKee watched her and said nothing. She interpreted the girl's white face and set lips as the result of having had to dismiss Schwitter again, and looked for time to bring peace, as it had done before.

Le Moyne came late to his midday meal. For once, the mental anæsthesia of endless figures had failed him. On his way home he had drawn his small savings from the bank, and mailed them, in cash and registered, to a back street in the slums of a distant city. He had done this before, and always with a feeling of exaltation, as if, for a time at least, the burden he carried was lightened. But to-day he ex-

perienced no compensatory relief. Life was dull and stale to him, effort ineffectual. At thirty a man should look back with tenderness, forward with hope. K. Le Moyne dared not look back, and had no desire to look ahead into empty years.

Although he ate little, the dining-room was empty when he finished. Usually he had some cheerful banter for Tillie, to which she responded in kind. But, what with the heat and with heaviness of spirit, he did not notice her depression until he rose.

"Why, you're not sick, are you, Tillie?"

"Me? Oh, no. Low in my mind, I guess."

"It's the heat. It's fearful. Look here. If I send you two tickets to a roof garden where there's a variety show, can't you take a friend and go to-night?"

"Thanks; I guess I'll not go out."

Then, unexpectedly, she bent her head against a chair-back and fell to silent crying. K. let her cry for a moment. Then: —

"Now — tell me about it."

"I'm just worried; that's all."

"Let's see if we can't fix up the worries. Come, now, out with them!"

"I'm a wicked woman, Mr. Le Moyne."

"Then I'm the person to tell it to. I — I'm pretty much of a lost soul myself."

He put an arm over her shoulders and drew her up, facing him.

"Suppose we go into the parlor and talk it out. I'll bet things are not as bad as you imagine."

But when, in the parlor that had seen Mr. Schwitter's strange proposal of the morning, Tillie poured out her story, K.'s face grew grave.

"The wicked part is that I want to go with him," she finished. "I keep thinking about being out in the country, and him coming in to supper, and everything nice for him and me cleaned up and waiting — O my God! I've always been a good woman until now."

"I — I understand a great deal better than you think I do. You're not wicked. The only thing is —"

"Go on. Hit me with it."

"You might go on and be very happy. And as for the — for his wife, it won't do her any harm. It's only — if there are children."

"I know. I've thought of that. But I'm so crazy for children!"

"Exactly. So you should be. But when they come, and you cannot give them a name — don't you see? I'm not preaching morality. God forbid that I — But no happiness is built on a foundation of wrong. It's been tried before, Tillie, and it does n't pan out."

He was conscious of a feeling of failure when he left her at last. She had acquiesced in what he said, knew he was right, and even promised to talk to him again before making a decision one way or

the other. But against his abstractions of conduct and morality there was pleading in Tillie the hungry mother-heart; law and creed and early training were fighting against the strongest instinct of the race. It was a losing battle.

CHAPTER XI

THE hot August days dragged on. Merciless sunlight beat in through the slatted shutters of ward windows. At night, from the roof to which the nurses retired after prayers for a breath of air, lower surrounding roofs were seen to be covered with sleepers. Children dozed precariously on the edge of eternity; men and women sprawled in the grotesque postures of sleep.

There was a sort of feverish irritability in the air. Even the nurses, stoically unmindful of bodily discomfort, spoke curtly or not at all. Miss Dana, in Sidney's ward, went down with a low fever, and for a day or so Sidney and Miss Grange got along as best they could. Sidney worked like two or more, performed marvels of bed-making, learned to give alcohol baths for fever with the maximum of result and the minimum of time, even made rounds with a member of the staff and came through creditably.

Dr. Ed Wilson had sent a woman patient into the ward, and his visits were the breath of life to the girl.

"How're they treating you?" he asked her, one day, abruptly.

"Very well."

"Look at me squarely. You're pretty and you're

young. Some of them will try to take it out of you. That's human nature. Has any one tried it yet?"

Sidney looked distressed.

"Positively, no. It's been hot, and of course it's troublesome to tell me everything. I — I think they're all very kind."

He reached out a square, competent hand, and put it over hers.

"We miss you in the Street," he said. "It's all sort of dead there since you left. Joe Drummond does n't moon up and down any more, for one thing. What was wrong between you and Joe, Sidney?"

"I did n't want to marry him; that's all."

"That's considerable. The boy's taking it hard."

Then, seeing her face: —

"But you're right, of course. Don't marry any one unless you can't live without him. That's been my motto, and here I am, still single."

He went out and down the corridor. He had known Sidney all his life. During the lonely times when Max was at college and in Europe, he had watched her grow from a child to a young girl. He did not suspect for a moment that in that secret heart of hers he sat newly enthroned, in a glow of white light, as Max's brother; that the mere thought that he lived in Max's house (it was, of course, Max's house to her), sat at Max's breakfast table, could see him whenever he wished, made the touch of his hand on hers a benediction and a caress.

Sidney finished folding linen and went back to the

ward. It was Friday and a visiting day. Almost every bed had its visitor beside it; but Sidney, running an eye over the ward, found the girl of whom she had spoken to Le Moyne quite alone. She was propped up in bed, reading; but at each new step in the corridor hope would spring into her eyes and die again.

"Want anything, Grace?"

"Me? I'm all right. If these people would only get out and let me read in peace — Say, sit down and talk to me, won't you? It beats the mischief the way your friends forget you when you're laid up in a place like this."

"People can't always come at visiting hours. Besides, it's hot."

"A girl I knew was sick here last year, and it was n't too hot for me to trot in twice a week with a bunch of flowers for her. Do you think she's been here once? She has n't."

Then, suddenly: —

"You know that man I told you about the other day?"

Sidney nodded. The girl's anxious eyes were on her.

"It was a shock to me, that's all. I did n't want you to think I'd break my heart over any fellow. All I meant was, I wished he'd let me know."

Her eyes searched Sidney's. They looked unnaturally large and somber in her face. Her hair had been cut short, and her nightgown, open at the

neck, showed her thin throat and prominent clavicles.

"You're from the city, are n't you, Miss Page?"

"Yes."

"You told me the street, but I've forgotten it."

Sidney repeated the name of the Street, and slipped a fresh pillow under the girl's head.

"The evening paper says there's a girl going to be married on your street."

"Really! Oh, I think I know. A friend of mine is going to be married. Was the name Lorenz?"

"The girl's name was Lorenz. I — I don't remember the man's name."

"She is going to marry a Mr. Howe," said Sidney briskly. "Now, how do you feel? More comfy?"

"Fine! I suppose you'll be going to that wedding?"

"If I ever get time to have a dress made, I'll surely go."

Toward six o'clock the next morning, the night nurse was making out her reports. On one record, which said at the top, "Grace Irving, age 19," and an address which, to the initiated, told all her story, the night nurse wrote: —

"Did not sleep at all during night. Face set and eyes staring, but complains of no pain. Refused milk at eleven and three."

Carlotta Harrison, back from her vacation, reported for duty the next morning, and was assigned to E ward, which was Sidney's. She gave Sidney a

curt little nod, and proceeded to change the entire routine with the thoroughness of a Central American revolutionary president. Sidney, who had yet to learn that with some people authority can only assert itself by change, found herself confused, at sea, half resentful.

Once she ventured a protest: —

"I've been taught to do it that way, Miss Harrison. If my method is wrong, show me what you want, and I'll do my best."

"I am not responsible for what you have been taught. And you will not speak back when you are spoken to."

Small as the incident was, it marked a change in Sidney's position in the ward. She got the worst off-duty of the day, or none. Small humiliations were hers: late meals, disagreeable duties, endless and often unnecessary tasks. Even Miss Grange, now reduced to second place, remonstrated with her senior.

"I think a certain amount of severity is good for a probationer," she said, "but you are brutal, Miss Harrison."

"She's stupid."

"She's not at all stupid. She's going to be one of the best nurses in the house."

"Report me, then. Tell the Head I'm abusing Dr. Wilson's pet probationer, that I don't always say 'please' when I ask her to change a bed or take a temperature."

Miss Grange was not lacking in keenness. She did not go to the Head, which is unethical under any circumstances; but gradually there spread through the training-school a story that Carlotta Harrison was jealous of the new Page girl, Dr. Wilson's protégée. Things were still highly unpleasant in the ward, but they grew much better when Sidney was off duty. She was asked to join a small class that was studying French at night. As ignorant of the cause of her popularity as of the reason of her persecution, she went steadily on her way.

And she was gaining every day. Her mind was forming. She was learning to think for herself. For the first time, she was facing problems and demanding an answer. Why must there be Grace Irvings in the world? Why must the healthy babies of the obstetric ward go out to the slums and come back, in months or years, crippled for the great fight by the handicap of their environment, rickety, tuberculous, twisted? Why need the huge mills feed the hospitals daily with injured men?

And there were other things that she thought of. Every night, on her knees in the nurses' parlor at prayers, she promised, if she were accepted as a nurse, to try never to become calloused, never to regard her patients as "cases," never to allow the cleanliness and routine of her ward to delay a cup of water to the thirsty, or her arms to a sick child.

On the whole, the world was good, she found. And, of all the good things in it, the best was serv-

ice. True, there were hot days and restless nights, weary feet, and now and then a heartache. There was Miss Harrison, too. But to offset these there was the sound of Dr. Max's step in the corridor, and his smiling nod from the door; there was a "God bless you" now and then for the comfort she gave; there were wonderful nights on the roof under the stars, until K.'s little watch warned her to bed

While Sidney watched the stars from her hospital roof, while all around her the slum children, on other roofs, fought for the very breath of life, others who knew and loved her watched the stars, too. K. was having his own troubles in those days. Late at night, when Anna and Harriet had retired, he sat on the balcony and thought of many things. Anna Page was not well. He had noticed that her lips were rather blue, and had called in Dr. Ed. It was valvular heart disease. Anna was not to be told, or Sidney. It was Harriet's ruling.

"Sidney can't help any," said Harriet, "and for Heaven's sake let her have her chance. Anna may live for years. You know her as well as I do. If you tell her anything at all, she'll have Sidney here, waiting on her hand and foot."

And Le Moyne, fearful of urging too much because his own heart was crying out to have the girl back, assented.

Then, K. was anxious about Joe. The boy did not seem to get over the thing the way he should. Now

and then Le Moyne, resuming his old habit of wearying himself into sleep, would walk out into the country. On one such night he had overtaken Joe, tramping along with his head down.

Joe had not wanted his company, had plainly sulked. But Le Moyne had persisted.

"I'll not talk," he said; "but, since we're going the same way, we might as well walk together."

But after a time Joe had talked, after all. It was not much at first — a feverish complaint about the heat, and that if there was trouble in Mexico he thought he'd go.

"Wait until fall, if you're thinking of it," K. advised. "This is tepid compared with what you'll get down there."

"I've got to get away from here."

K. nodded understandingly. Since the scene at the White Springs Hotel, both knew that no explanation was necessary.

"It is n't so much that I mind her turning me down," Joe said, after a silence. "A girl can't marry all the men who want her. But I don't like this hospital idea. I don't understand it. She did n't have to go. Sometimes" — he turned bloodshot eyes on Le Moyne — "I think she went because she was crazy about somebody there."

"She went because she wanted to be useful."

"She could be useful at home."

For almost twenty minutes they tramped on without speech. They had made a circle, and the lights

of the city were close again. K. stopped and put a kindly hand on Joe's shoulder.

"A man's got to stand up under a thing like this, you know. I mean, it must n't be a knockout. Keeping busy is a darned good method."

Joe shook himself free, but without resentment.

"I'll tell you what's eating me up," he exploded. "It's Max Wilson. Don't talk to me about her going to the hospital to be useful. She's crazy about nim, and he's as crooked as a dog's hind leg."

"Perhaps. But it's always up to the girl. You know that."

He felt immeasurably old beside Joe's boyish blustering — old and rather helpless.

"I'm watching him. Some of these days I'll get something on him. Then she'll know what to think of her hero!"

"That's not quite square, is it?"

"He's not square."

Joe had left him then, wheeling abruptly off into the shadows. K. had gone home alone, rather uneasy. There seemed to be mischief in the very air.

CHAPTER XII

TILLIE was gone.

Oddly enough, the last person to see her before she left was Harriet Kennedy. On the third day after Mr. Schwitter's visit, Harriet's colored maid had announced a visitor.

Harriet's business instinct had been good. She had taken expensive rooms in a good location, and furnished them with the assistance of a decorator. Then she arranged with a New York house to sell her models on commission.

Her short excursion to New York had marked for Harriet the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth. Here, at last, she found people speaking her own language. She ventured a suggestion to a manufacturer, and found it greeted, not, after the manner of the Street, with scorn, but with approval and some surprise.

"About once in ten years," said Mr. Arthurs, "we have a woman from out of town bring us a suggestion that is both novel and practical. When we find people like that, we watch them. They climb, madame, — climb."

Harriet's climbing was not so rapid as to make her dizzy; but business was coming. The first time she made a price of seventy-five dollars for an evening

gown, she went out immediately after and took a drink of water. Her throat was parched.

She began to learn little quips of the feminine mind: that a woman who can pay seventy-five will pay double that sum; that it is not considered good form to show surprise at a dressmaker's prices, no matter how high they may be; that long mirrors and artificial lights help sales — no woman over thirty but was grateful for her pink-and-gray room with its soft lights. And Harriet herself conformed to the picture. She took a lesson from the New York modistes, and wore trailing black gowns. She strapped her thin figure into the best corset she could get, and had her black hair marcelled and dressed high. And, because she was a lady by birth and instinct, the result was not incongruous, but refined and rather impressive.

She took her business home with her at night, lay awake scheming, and wakened at dawn to find fresh color combinations in the early sky. She wakened early because she kept her head tied up in a towel, so that her hair need be done only three times a week. That and the corset were the penalties she paid. Her high-heeled shoes were a torment, too; but in the work-room she kicked them off.

To this new Harriet, then, came Tillie in her distress. Tillie was rather overwhelmed at first. The Street had always considered Harriet "proud." But Tillie's urgency was great, her methods direct.

"Why, Tillie!" said Harriet.

"Yes'm."

"Will you sit down?"

Tillie sat. She was not daunted now. While she worked at the fingers of her silk gloves, what Harriet took for nervousness was pure abstraction.

"It's very nice of you to come to see me. Do you like my rooms?"

Tillie surveyed the rooms, and Harriet caught her first full view of her face.

"Is there anything wrong? Have you left Mrs. McKee?"

"I think so. I came to talk to you about it."

It was Harriet's turn to be overwhelmed.

"She's very fond of you. If you have had any words —"

"It's not that. I'm just leaving. I'd like to talk to you, if you don't mind."

"Certainly."

Tillie hitched her chair closer.

"I'm up against something, and I can't seem to make up my mind. Last night I said to myself, 'I've got to talk to some woman who's not married, like me, and not as young as she used to be. There's no use going to Mrs. McKee: she's a widow, and would n't understand.' "

Harriet's voice was a trifle sharp as she replied. She never lied about her age, but she preferred to forget it.

"I wish you'd tell me what you're getting at."

"It ain't the sort of thing to come to too sudden.

But it's like this. You and I can pretend all we like, Miss Harriet; but we're not getting all out of life that the Lord meant us to have. You've got them wax figures instead of children, and I have mealers."

A little spot of color came into Harriet's cheek. But she was interested. Regardless of the corset, she bent forward.

"Maybe that's true. Go on."

"I'm almost forty. Ten years more at the most, and I'm through. I'm slowing up. Can't get around the tables as I used to. Why, yesterday I put sugar into Mr. Le Moyne's coffee — well, never mind about that. Now I've got a chance to get a home, with a good man to look after me — I like him pretty well, and he thinks a lot of me."

"Mercy sake, Tillie! You are going to get married?"

"No'm," said Tillie; "that's it." And sat silent for a moment.

The gray curtains with their pink cording swung gently in the open windows. From the work-room came the distant hum of a sewing-machine and the sound of voices. Harriet sat with her hands in her lap and listened while Tillie poured out her story. The gates were down now. She told it all, consistently and with unconscious pathos: her little room under the roof at Mrs. McKee's, and the house in the country; her loneliness, and the loneliness of the man; even the faint stirrings of potential motherhood, her empty arms, her advancing age — all this she knit

into the fabric of her story and laid at Harriet's feet, as the ancients put their questions to their gods.

Harriet was deeply moved. Too much that Tillie poured out to her found an echo in her own breast. What was this thing she was striving for but a substitute for the real things of life — love and tenderness, children, a home of her own? Quite suddenly she loathed the gray carpet on the floor, the pink chairs, the shaded lamps. Tillie was no longer the waitress at a cheap boarding-house. She loomed large, potential, courageous, a woman who held life in her hands.

"Why don't you go to Mrs. Rosenfeld? She's your aunt, is n't she?"

"She thinks any woman's a fool to take up with a man."

"You're giving me a terrible responsibility, Tillie, if you're asking my advice."

"No'm. I'm asking what you'd do if it happened to you. Suppose you had no people that cared anything about you, nobody to disgrace, and all your life nobody had really cared anything about you. And then a chance like this came along. What would you do?"

"I don't know," said poor Harriet. "It seems to me — I'm afraid I'd be tempted. It does seem as if a woman had the right to be happy, even if —"

Her own words frightened her. It was as if some hidden self, and not she, had spoken. She hastened

to point out the other side of the matter, the insecurity of it, the disgrace. Like K., she insisted that no right can be built out of a wrong. Tillie sat and smoothed her gloves. At last, when Harriet paused in sheer panic, the girl rose.

"I know how you feel, and I don't want you to take the responsibility of advising me," she said quietly. "I guess my mind was made up anyhow. But before I did it I just wanted to be sure that a decent woman would think the way I do about it."

And so, for a time, Tillie went out of the life of the Street as she went out of Harriet's handsome rooms, quietly, unobtrusively, with calm purpose in her eyes.

There were other changes in the Street. The Lorenz house was being painted for Christine's wedding. Johnny Rosenfeld, not perhaps of the Street itself, but certainly pertaining to it, was learning to drive Palmer Howe's new car, in mingled agony and bliss. He walked along the Street, not "right foot, left foot," but "brake foot, clutch foot," and took to calling off the vintage of passing cars. "So-and-So 1910," he would say, with contempt in his voice. He spent more than he could afford on a large streamer, meant to be fastened across the rear of the automobile, which said, "Excuse our dust," and was inconsolable when Palmer refused to let him use it.

K. had yielded to Anna's insistence, and was boarding as well as rooming at the Page house. The

Street, rather snobbish to its occasional floating population, was accepting and liking him. It found him tender, infinitely human. And in return he found that this seemingly empty eddy into which he had drifted was teeming with life. He busied himself with small things, and found his outlook gradually less tinged with despair. When he found himself inclined to rail, he organized a baseball club, and sent down to everlasting defeat the Linburgs, consisting of cash-boys from Linden and Hofburg's department store.

The Rosenfelds adored him with the single exception of the head of the family. The elder Rosenfeld having been "sent up," it was K. who discovered that by having him consigned to the workhouse his family would receive from the county some sixty-five cents a day for his labor. As this was exactly sixty-five cents a day more than he was worth to them free, Mrs. Rosenfeld voiced the pious hope that he be kept there forever.

K. made no further attempt to avoid Max Wilson. Some day they would meet face to face. He hoped, when it happened, they two might be alone; that was all. Even had he not been bound by his promise to Sidney, flight would have been foolish. The world was a small place, and, one way and another, he had known many people. Wherever he went, there would be the same chance.

And he did not deceive himself. Other things being equal, — the eddy and all that it meant, —

he would not willingly take himself out of his small share of Sidney's life.

She was never to know what she meant to him, of course. He had scourged his heart until it no longer shone in his eyes when he looked at her. But he was very human — not at all meek. There were plenty of days when his philosophy lay in the dust and savage dogs of jealousy tore at it; more than one evening when he threw himself face downward on the bed and lay without moving for hours. And of these periods of despair he was always heartily ashamed the next day.

The meeting with Max Wilson took place early in September, and under better circumstances than he could have hoped for.

Sidney had come home for her weekly visit, and her mother's condition had alarmed her for the first time. When Le Moyne came home at six o'clock, he found her waiting for him in the hall.

"I am just a little frightened, K.," she said. "Do you think mother is looking quite well?"

"She has felt the heat, of course. The summer—"

"Her lips are blue!"

"It's probably nothing serious."

"She says you've had Dr. Ed over to see her."

She put her hands on his arm and looked up at him with appeal and something of terror in her face.

Thus cornered, he had to acknowledge that Anna had been out of sorts.

"I shall come home, of course. It's tragic and

absurd that I should be caring for other people, when my own mother —"

She dropped her head on his arm, and he saw that she was crying. If he made a gesture to draw her to him, she never knew it. After a moment she looked up.

"I'm much braver than this in the hospital. But when it's one's own!"

K. was sorely tempted to tell her the truth and bring her back to the little house: to their old evenings together, to seeing the younger Wilson, not as the white god of the operating-room and the hospital, but as the dandy of the Street and the neighbor of her childhood — back even to Joe.

But, with Anna's precarious health and Harriet's increasing engrossment in her business, he felt it more and more necessary that Sidney go on with her training. A profession was a safeguard. And there was another point: it had been decided that Anna was not to know her condition. If she was not worried she might live for years. There was no surer way to make her suspect it than by bringing Sidney home.

Sidney sent Katie to ask Dr. Ed to come over after dinner. With the sunset Anna seemed better. She insisted on coming downstairs, and even sat with them on the balcony until the stars came out, talking of Christine's trousseau, and, rather fretfully, of what she would do without the parlors.

"You shall have your own boudoir upstairs,"

said Sidney valiantly. "Katie can carry your tray up there. We are going to make the sewing-room into your private sitting-room, and I shall *nail* the machine-top down."

This pleased her. When K. insisted on carrying her upstairs, she went in a flutter.

"He is so strong, Sidney!" she said, when he had placed her on her bed. "How can a clerk, bending over a ledger, be so muscular? When I have callers, will it be all right for Katie to show them upstairs?"

She dropped asleep before the doctor came; and when, at something after eight, the door of the Wilson house slammed and a figure crossed the street, it was not Ed at all, but the surgeon.

Sidney had been talking rather more frankly than usual. Lately there had been a reserve about her. K., listening intently that night, read between words a story of small persecutions and jealousies. But the girl minimized them, after her way.

"It's always hard for probationers," she said. "I often think Miss Harrison is trying my mettle."

"Harrison!"

"Carlotta Harrison. And now that Miss Gregg has said she will accept me, it's really all over. The other nurses are wonderful — so kind and so helpful. I hope I shall look well in my cap."

Carlotta Harrison was in Sidney's hospital! A thousand contingencies flashed through his mind. Sidney might grow to like her and bring her to the

house. Sidney might insist on the thing she always spoke of — that he visit the hospital; and he would meet her, face to face. He could have depended on a man to keep his secret. This girl with her somber eyes and her threat to pay him out for what had happened to her — she meant danger of a sort that no man could fight.

"Soon," said Sidney, through the warm darkness, "I shall have a cap, and be always forgetting it and putting my hat on over it — the new ones always do. One of the girls slept in hers the other night! They are tulle, you know, and quite stiff, and it was the most erratic-looking thing the next day!"

It was then that the door across the street closed. Sidney did not hear it, but K. bent forward. There was a part of his brain always automatically on watch.

"I shall get my operating-room training, too," she went on. "That is the real romance of the hospital. A — a surgeon is a sort of hero in a hospital. You would n't think that, would you? There was a lot of excitement to-day. Even the probationers' table was talking about it. Dr. Max Wilson did the Edwardes operation."

The figure across the Street was lighting a cigarette. Perhaps, after all –

"Something tremendously difficult — I don't know what. It's going into the medical journals. A Dr. Edwardes invented it, or whatever they call it. They took a picture of the operating-room for the

article. The photographer had to put on operating clothes and wrap the camera in sterilized towels. It was the most thrilling thing, they say —"

Her voice died away as her eyes followed K.'s. Max, cigarette in hand, was coming across, under the ailanthus tree. He hesitated on the pavement, his eyes searching the shadowy balcony.

"Sidney?"

"Here! Right back here!"

There was vibrant gladness in her tone. He came slowly toward them.

"My brother is not at home, so I came over. How select you are, with your balcony!"

"Can you see the step?"

"Coming, with bells on."

K. had risen and pushed back his chair. His mind was working quickly. Here in the darkness he could hold the situation for a moment. If he could get Sidney into the house, the rest would not matter. Luckily, the balcony was very dark.

" Is any one ill?"

"Mother is not well. This is Mr. Le Moyne, and he knows who you are very well, indeed."

The two men shook hands.

"I've heard a lot of Mr. Le Moyne. Did n't the Street beat the Linburgs the other day? And I believe the Rosenfelds are in receipt of sixty-five cents a day and considerable peace and quiet through you, Mr. Le Moyne. You're the most popular man on the Street."

"I've always heard that about *you*. Sidney, if Dr. Wilson is here to see your mother —"

"Going," said Sidney. "And Dr. Wilson is a very great person, K., so be polite to him."

Max had roused at the sound of Le Moyne's voice, not to suspicion, of course, but to memory. Without any apparent reason, he was back in Berlin, tramping the country roads, and beside him —

"Wonderful night!"

"Great," he replied. "The mind's a curious thing, is n't it. In the instant since Miss Page went through that window I've been to Berlin and back! Will you have a cigarette?"

"Thanks; I have my pipe here."

K. struck a match with his steady hands. Now that the thing had come, he was glad to face it. In the flare, his quiet profile glowed against the night. Then he flung the match over the rail.

"Perhaps my voice took you back to Berlin."

Max stared; then he rose. Blackness had descended on them again, except for the dull glow of K.'s old pipe.

"For God's sake!"

"Sh! The neighbors next door have a bad habit of sitting just inside the curtains."

"But — you!"

"Sit down. Sidney will be back in a moment. I'll talk to you, if you'll sit still. Can you hear me plainly?"

After a moment — "Yes."

"I've been here — in the city, I mean — for a year. Name's Le Moyne. Don't forget it — Le Moyne. I've got a position in the gas office, clerical. I get fifteen dollars a week. I have reason to think I'm going to be moved up. That will be twenty, maybe twenty-two."

Wilson stirred, but he found no adequate words. Only a part of what K. said got to him. For a moment he was back in a famous clinic, and this man across from him — it was not believable!

"It's not hard work, and it's safe. If I make a mistake there's no life hanging on it. Once I made a blunder, a month or two ago. It was a big one. It cost me three dollars out of my own pocket. But — that's all it cost."

Wilson's voice showed that he was more than incredulous; he was profoundly moved.

"We thought you were dead. There were all sorts of stories. When a year went by — the Titanic had gone down, and nobody knew but what you were on it — we gave up. I — in June we put up a tablet for you at the college. I went down for the — for the services."

"Let it stay," said K. quietly. "I'm dead as far as the college goes, anyhow. I'll never go back. I'm Le Moyne now. And, for Heaven's sake, don't be sorry for me. I'm more contented than I've been for a long time."

The wonder in Wilson's voice was giving way to irritation.

"But — when you had everything! Why, good Heavens, man, I did your operation to-day, and I've been blowing about it ever since."

"I had everything for a while. Then I lost the essential. When that happened I gave up. All a man in our profession has is a certain method, knowledge — call it what you like, — and faith in himself. I lost my self-confidence; that's all. Certain things happened; kept on happening. So I gave it up. That's all. It's not dramatic. For about a year I was damned sorry for myself. I've stopped whining now."

"If every surgeon gave up because he lost cases — I've just told you I did your operation to-day. There was just a chance for the man, and I took my courage in my hands and tried it. The poor devil's dead."

K. rose rather wearily and emptied his pipe over the balcony rail.

"That's not the same. That's the chance he and you took. What happened to me was — different."

Pipe in hand, he stood staring out at the ailanthus tree with its crown of stars. Instead of the Street with its quiet houses, he saw the men he had known and worked with and taught, his friends who spoke his language, who had loved him, many of them, gathered about a bronze tablet set in a wall of the old college; he saw their earnest faces and grave eyes. He heard —

He heard the soft rustle of Sidney's dress as she came into the little room behind them.

CHAPTER XIII

A FEW days after Wilson's recognition of K., two most exciting things happened to Sidney. One was that Christine asked her to be maid of honor at her wedding. The other was more wonderful. She was accepted, and given her cap.

Because she could not get home that night, and because the little house had no telephone, she wrote the news to her mother and sent a note to Le Moyne:

DEAR K., — I am accepted, and *it* is on my head at this minute. I am as conscious of it as if it were a halo, and as if I had done something to deserve it, instead of just hoping that some day I shall. I am writing this on the bureau, so that when I lift my eyes I may see It. I am afraid just now I am thinking more of the cap than of what it means. It *is* becoming!

Very soon I shall slip down and show it to the ward. I have promised. I shall go to the door when the night nurse is busy somewhere, and turn all around and let them see it, without saying a word. They love a little excitement like that.

You have been very good to me, dear K. It is you who have made possible this happiness of mine to-night. I am promising myself to be very good, and not so vain, and to love my enemies —

although I have none now. Miss Harrison has just congratulated me most kindly, and I am sure poor Joe has both forgiven and forgotten.

Off to my first lecture!

SIDNEY.

K. found the note on the hall table when he got home that night, and carried it upstairs to read. Whatever faint hope he might have had that her youth would prevent her acceptance he knew now was over. With the letter in his hand, he sat by his table and looked ahead into the empty years. Not quite empty, of course. She would be coming home.

But more and more the life of the hospital would engross her. He surmised, too, very shrewdly, that, had he ever had a hope that she might come to care for him, his very presence in the little house militated against him. There was none of the illusion of separation; he was always there, like Katie. When she opened the door, she called "Mother" from the hall. If Anna did not answer, she called him, in much the same voice.

He had built a wall of philosophy that had withstood even Wilson's recognition and protest. But enduring philosophy comes only with time; and he was young. Now and then all his defenses crumbled before a passion that, when he dared to face it, shook him by its very strength. And that day all his stoicism went down before Sidney's letter. Its very

frankness and affection hurt — not that he did not want her affection; but he craved so much more. He threw himself face down on the bed, with the paper crushed in his hand.

Sidney's letter was not the only one he received that day. When, in response to Katie's summons, he rose heavily and prepared for dinner, he found an unopened envelope on the table. It was from Max Wilson: —

DEAR LE MOYNE, — I have been going around in a sort of haze all day. The fact that I only heard your voice and scarcely saw you last night has made the whole thing even more unreal.

I have a feeling of delicacy about trying to see you again so soon. I'm bound to respect your seclusion. But there are some things that have got to be discussed.

You said last night that things were "different" with you. I know about that. You'd had one or two unlucky accidents. Do you know any man in our profession who has not? And, for fear you think I do not know what I am talking about, the thing was threshed out at the State Society when the question of the tablet came up. Old Barnes got up and said: "Gentlemen, all of us live more or less in glass houses. Let him who is without guilt among us throw the first stone!" By George! You should have heard them!

I did n't sleep last night. I took my little car and

drove around the country roads, and the farther I went the more outrageous your position became. I'm not going to write any rot about the world needing men like you, although it's true enough. But our profession does. You working in a gas office, while old O'Hara bungles and hacks, and I struggle along on what I learned from you!

It takes courage to step down from the pinnacle you stood on. So it's not cowardice that has set you down here. It's wrong conception. And I've thought of two things. The first, and best, is for you to go back. No one has taken your place, because no one could do the work. But if that's out of the question, — and only you know that, for only you know the facts, — the next best thing is this, and in all humility I make the suggestion.

Take the State exams under your present name, and when you've got your certificate, come in with me. This is n't magnanimity. I'll be getting a damn sight more than I give.

Think it over, old man. M. W.

It is a curious fact that a man who is absolutely untrustworthy about women is often the soul of honor to other men. The younger Wilson, taking his pleasures lightly and not too discriminatingly, was making an offer that meant his ultimate eclipse, and doing it cheerfully, with his eyes open.

K. was moved. It was like Max to make such an offer, like him to [illegible] it as if he were asking a favor

and not conferring one. But the offer left him untempted. He had weighed himself in the balance, and found himself wanting. No tablet on the college wall could change that. And when, late that night, Wilson found him on the balcony and added appeal to argument, the situation remained unchanged. He realized its hopelessness when K. lapsed into whimsical humor.

"I'm not absolutely useless where I am, you know, Max," he said. "I've raised three tomato plants and a family of kittens this summer, helped to plan a trousseau, assisted in selecting wall-paper for the room just inside, — did you notice it? — and developed a boy pitcher with a ball that twists around the bat like a Colles fracture around a splint!"

"If you're going to be humorous —"

"My dear fellow," said K. quietly, "if I had no sense of humor, I should go upstairs to-night, turn on the gas, and make a stertorous entrance into eternity. By the way, that's something I forgot!"

"Eternity?"

"No. Among my other activities, I wired the parlor for electric light. The bride-to-be expects some electroliers as wedding gifts, and —"

Wilson rose and flung his cigarette into the grass.

"I wish to God I understood you!" he said irritably.

K. rose with him, and all the suppressed feeling of the interview was crowded into his last few words.

"I'm not as ungrateful as you think, Max," he said. "I — you've helped a lot. Don't worry about me. I'm as well off as I deserve to be, and better Good-night."

"Good-night."

Wilson's unexpected magnanimity put K. in a curious position — left him, as it were, with a divided allegiance. Sidney's frank infatuation for the young surgeon was growing. He was quick to see it. And where before he might have felt justified in going to the length of warning her, now his hands were tied.

Max was interested in her. K. could see that, too. More than once he had taken Sidney back to the hospital in his car. Le Moyne, handicapped at every turn, found himself facing two alternatives, one but little better than the other. The affair might run a legitimate course, ending in marriage — a year of happiness for her, and then what marriage with Max, as he knew him, would inevitably mean: wanderings away, remorseful returns to her, infidelities, misery. Or, it might be less serious but almost equally unhappy for her. Max might throw caution to the winds, pursue her for a time, — K. had seen him do this, — and then, growing tired, change to some new attraction. In either case, he could only wait and watch, eating his heart out during the long evenings when Anna read her "Daily Thoughts" upstairs and he sat alone with his pipe on the balcony.

Sidney went on night duty shortly after her

acceptance. All of her orderly young life had been divided into two parts: day, when one played or worked, and night, when one slept. Now she was compelled to a readjustment: one worked in the night and slept in the day. Things seemed unnatural, chaotic. At the end of her first night report Sidney added what she could remember of a little verse of Stevenson's. She added it to the end of her general report, which was to the effect that everything had been quiet during the night except the neighborhood.

> "And does it not seem hard to you,
> When all the sky is clear and blue,
> And I should like so much to play,
> To have to go to bed by day?"

The day assistant happened on the report, and was quite scandalized.

"If the night nurses are to spend their time making up poetry," she said crossly, "we'd better change this hospital into a young ladies' seminary. If she wants to complain about the noise in the street, she should do so in proper form."

"I don't think she made it up," said the Head, trying not to smile. "I've heard something like it somewhere, and, what with the heat and the noise of traffic, I don't see how any of them get any sleep."

But, because discipline must be observed, she wrote on the slip the assistant carried around: "Please submit night reports in prose."

Sidney did not sleep much. She tumbled into her low bed at nine o'clock in the morning, those days, with her splendid hair neatly braided down her back and her prayers said, and immediately her active young mind filled with images — Christine's wedding, Dr. Max passing the door of her old ward and she not there, Joe -- even Tillie, whose story was now the sensation of the Street. A few months before she would not have cared to think of Tillie. She would have retired her into the land of things-one-must-forget. But the Street's conventions were not holding Sidney's thoughts now. She puzzled over Tillie a great deal, and over Grace and her kind.

On her first night on duty, a girl had been brought in from the Avenue. She had taken a poison — nobody knew just what. When the internes had tried to find out, she had only said: "What's the use?"

And she had died.

Sidney kept asking herself, "Why?" those mornings when she could not get to sleep. People were kind, — men were kind, really, — and yet, for some reason or other, those things had to be. Why?

After a time Sidney would doze fitfully. But by three o'clock she was always up and dressing. After a time the strain told on her. Lack of sleep wrote hollows around her eyes and killed some of her bright color. Between three and four o'clock in the morning she was overwhelmed on duty by a perfect madness of sleep. There was a penalty for sleeping on duty. The old night watchman had a way of slip-

ping up on one nodding. The night nurses wished they might fasten a bell on him!

Luckily, at four came early-morning temperatures; that roused her. And after that came the clatter of early milk-wagons and the rose hues of dawn over the roofs. Twice in the night, once at supper and again toward dawn, she drank strong black coffee. But after a week or two her nerves were stretched taut as a string.

Her station was in a small room close to her three wards. But she sat very little, as a matter of fact. Her responsibility was heavy on her; she made frequent rounds. The late summer nights were fitful, feverish; the darkened wards stretched away like caverns from the dim light near the door. And from out of these caverns came petulant voices, uneasy movements, the banging of a cup on a bedside, which was the signal of thirst.

The older nurses saved themselves when they could. To them, perhaps just a little weary with time and much service, the banging cup meant not so much thirst as annoyance. They visited Sidney sometimes and cautioned her.

"Don't jump like that, child; they're not parched, you know."

"But if you have a fever and are thirsty —"

"Thirsty nothing! They get lonely. All they want is to see somebody."

"Then," Sidney would say, rising resolutely, "they are going to see me."

Gradually the older girls saw that she would not save herself. They liked her very much, and they, too, had started in with willing feet and tender hands; but the thousand and one demands of their service had drained them dry. They were efficient, cool-headed, quick-thinking machines, doing their best, of course, but differing from Sidney in that their service was of the mind, while hers was of the heart. To them, pain was a thing to be recorded on a report; to Sidney, it was written on the tablets of her soul.

Carlotta Harrison went on night duty at the same time — her last night service, as it was Sidney's first. She accepted it stoically. She had charge of the three wards on the floor just below Sidney, and of the ward into which all emergency cases were taken. It was a difficult service, perhaps the most difficult in the house. Scarcely a night went by without its patrol or ambulance case. Ordinarily, the emergency ward had its own night nurse. But the house was full to overflowing. Belated vacations and illness had depleted the training-school. Carlotta, given double duty, merely shrugged her shoulders.

"I've always had things pretty hard here," she commented briefly. "When I go out, I'll either be competent enough to run a whole hospital single-handed, or I'll be carried out feet first."

Sidney was glad to have her so near. She knew her better than she knew the other nurses. Small emergencies were constantly arising and finding her

at a loss. Once at least every night, Miss Harrison would hear a soft hiss from the back staircase that connected the two floors, and, going out, would see Sidney's flushed face and slightly crooked cap bending over the stair-rail.

"I'm dreadfully sorry to bother you," she would say, "but So-and-So won't have a fever bath"; or, "I've a woman here who refuses her medicine." Then would follow rapid questions and equally rapid answers. Much as Carlotta disliked and feared the girl overhead, it never occurred to her to refuse her assistance. Perhaps the angels who keep the great record will put that to her credit.

Sidney saw her first death shortly after she went on night duty. It was the most terrible experience of all her life; and yet, as death goes, it was quiet enough. So gradual was it that Sidney, with K.'s little watch in hand, was not sure exactly when it happened. The light was very dim behind the little screen. One moment the sheet was quivering slightly under the struggle for breath, the next it was still. That was all. But to the girl it was catastrophe. That life, so potential, so tremendous a thing, could end so ignominiously, that the long battle should terminate always in this capitulation — it seemed to her that she could not stand it. Added to all her other new problems of living was this one of dying.

She made mistakes, of course, which the kindly nurses forgot to report — basins left about, errors

on her records. She rinsed her thermometer in hot water one night, and startled an interne by sending him word that Mary McGuire's temperature was a hundred and ten degrees. She let a delirious patient escape from the ward another night and go airily down the fire-escape before she discovered what had happened! Then she distinguished herself by flying down the iron staircase and bringing the runaway back single-handed.

For Christine's wedding the Street threw off its drab attire and assumed a wedding garment. In the beginning it was incredulous about some of the details.

"An awning from the house door to the curbstone, and a policeman!" reported Mrs. Rosenfeld, who was finding steady employment at the Lorenz house. "And another awning at the church, with a red carpet!"

Mr. Rosenfeld had arrived home and was making up arrears of rest and recreation.

"Huh!" he said. "Suppose it don't rain. What then?" His Jewish father spoke in him.

"And another policeman at the church!" said Mrs. Rosenfeld triumphantly.

"Why do they ask 'em if they don't trust 'em?"

But the mention of the policemen had been unfortunate. It recalled to him many things that were better forgotten. He rose and scowled at his wife.

"You tell Johnny something for me," he snarled. "You tell him when he sees his father walking down street, and he sittin' up there alone on that automobile, I want him to stop and pick me up when I hail him. Me walking, while my son swells around in a car! And another thing." He turned savagely at the door. "You let me hear of him road-housin', and I'll kill him!"

The wedding was to be at five o'clock. This, in itself, defied all traditions of the Street, which was either married in the very early morning at the Catholic church or at eight o'clock in the evening at the Presbyterian. There was something reckless about five o'clock. The Street felt the dash of it. It had a queer feeling that perhaps such a marriage was not quite legal.

The question of what to wear became, for the men, an earnest one. Dr. Ed resurrected an old black frock-coat and had a "V" of black cambric set in the vest. Mr. Jenkins, the grocer, rented a cutaway, and bought a new Panama to wear with it. The deaf-and-dumb book agent who boarded at McKees', and who, by reason of his affliction, was calmly ignorant of the excitement around him, wore a borrowed dress-suit, and considered himself to the end of his days the only properly attired man in the church.

The younger Wilson was to be one of the ushers. When the newspapers came out with the published list and this was discovered, as well as that Sidney

was the maid of honor, there was a distinct quiver through the hospital training-school. A probationer was authorized to find out particulars. It was the day of the wedding then, and Sidney, who had not been to bed at all, was sitting in a sunny window in the Dormitory Annex, drying her hair.

The probationer was distinctly uneasy.

"I — I just wonder," she said, "if you would let some of the girls come in to see you when you're dressed?"

"Why, of course I will."

"It's awfully thrilling, is n't it? And — is n't Dr. Wilson going to be an usher?"

Sidney colored. "I believe so."

"Are you going to walk down the aisle with him?"

"I don't know. They had a rehearsal last night, but of course I was not there. I — I think I walk alone."

The probationer had been instructed to find out other things; so she set to work with a fan at Sidney's hair.

"You've known Dr. Wilson a long time, have n't you?"

"Ages."

"He's awfully good-looking, is n't he?"

Sidney considered. She was not ignorant of the methods of the school. If this girl was pumping her —

"I'll have to think that over," she said, with a glint of mischief in her eyes. "When you know a

person terribly well, you hardly know whether he's good-looking or not."

"I suppose," said the probationer, running the long strands of Sidney's hair through her fingers, "that when you are at home you see him often."

Sidney got off the window-sill, and, taking the probationer smilingly by the shoulders, faced her toward the door.

"You go back to the girls," she said, "and tell them to come in and see me when I am dressed, and tell them this: I don't know whether I am to walk down the aisle with Dr. Wilson, but I hope I am. I see him very often. I like him very much. I hope he likes me. And I think he's handsome."

She shoved the probationer out into the hall and locked the door behind her.

That message in its entirety reached Carlotta Harrison. Her smouldering eyes flamed. The audacity of it startled her. Sidney must be very sure of herself.

She, too, had not slept during the day. When the probationer who had brought her the report had gone out, she lay in her long white night-gown, hands clasped under her head, and stared at the vault-like ceiling of her little room.

She saw there Sidney in her white dress going down the aisle of the church; she saw the group around the altar; and, as surely as she lay there, she knew that Max Wilson's eyes would be, not on the bride, but on the girl who stood beside her.

The curious thing was that Carlotta felt that she could stop the wedding if she wanted to. She'd happened on a bit of information — many a wedding had been stopped for less. It rather obsessed her to think of stopping the wedding, so that Sidney and Max would not walk down the aisle together.

There came, at last, an hour before the wedding a lull in the feverish activities of the previous month. Everything was ready. In the Lorenz kitchen, piles of plates, negro waiters, ice-cream freezers, and Mrs. Rosenfeld stood in orderly array. In the attic, in the center of a sheet, before a toilet-table which had been carried upstairs for her benefit, sat, on this her day of days, the bride. All the second story had been prepared for guests and presents.

Florists were still busy in the room below. Bridesmaids were clustered on the little staircase, bending over at each new ring of the bell and calling reports to Christine through the closed door: —

"Another wooden box, Christine. It looks like more plates. What will you ever do with them all?"

"Good Heavens! Here's another of the neighbors who wants to see how you look. Do say you can't have any visitors now."

Christine sat alone in the center of her sheet. The bridesmaids had been sternly forbidden to come into her room.

"I have n't had a chance to think for a month," she said. "And I've got some things I've got to think out."

But, when Sidney came, she sent for her. Sidney found her sitting on a stiff chair, in her wedding-gown, with her veil spread out on a small stand.

"Close the door," said Christine. And, after Sidney had kissed her: —

"I've a good mind not to do it."

"You're tired and nervous, that's all."

"I am, of course. But that is n't what's wrong with me. Throw that veil some place and sit down."

Christine was undoubtedly rouged, a very delicate touch. Sidney thought brides should be rather pale. But under her eyes were lines that Sidney had never seen there before.

"I'm not going to be foolish, Sidney. I'll go through with it, of course. It would put mamma in her grave if I made a scene now."

She suddenly turned on Sidney.

"Palmer gave his bachelor dinner at the Country Club last night. They all drank more than they should. Somebody called father up to-day and said that Palmer had emptied a bottle of wine into the piano. He has n't been here to-day."

"He'll be along. And as for the other — perhaps it was n't Palmer who did it."

"That's not it, Sidney. I'm frightened."

Three months before, perhaps, Sidney could not have comforted her; but three months had made a change in Sidney. The complacent sophistries of her girlhood no longer answered for truth. She put her arms around Christine's shoulders.

"A man who drinks is a broken reed," said Christine. "That's what I'm going to marry and lean on the rest of my life — a broken reed. And that is n't all!"

She got up quickly, and, trailing her long satin train across the floor, bolted the door. Then from inside her corsage she brought out and held to Sidney a letter. "Special delivery. Read it."

It was very short; Sidney read it at a glance: —

Ask your future husband if he knows a girl at 213 —— Avenue.

Three months before, the Avenue would have meant nothing to Sidney. Now she knew. Christine, more sophisticated, had always known.

"You see," she said. "That's what I'm up against."

Quite suddenly Sidney knew who the girl at 213 —— Avenue was. The paper she held in her hand was hospital paper with the heading torn off. The whole sordid story lay before her: Grace Irving, with her thin face and cropped hair, and the newspaper on the floor of the ward beside her!

One of the bridesmaids thumped violently on the door outside.

"Another electric lamp," she called excitedly through the door. "And Palmer is downstairs."

"You see," Christine said drearily. "I have received another electric lamp, and Palmer is down-

affairs! I've got to go through with it, I suppose. The only difference between me and other brides is that I know what I'm getting. Most of them do not."

"You're going on with it?"

"It's too late to do anything else. I am not going to give this neighborhood anything to talk about."

She picked up her veil and set the coronet on her head. Sidney stood with the letter in her hands. One of K.'s answers to her hot question had been this: —

"There is no sense in looking back unless it helps us to look ahead. What your little girl of the ward has been is not so important as what she is going to be."

"Even granting this to be true," she said to Christine slowly, — "and it may only be malicious, after all, Christine, — it's surely over and done with. It's not Palmer's past that concerns you now: it's his future with you, is n't it?"

Christine had finally adjusted her veil. A band of duchesse lace rose like a coronet from her soft hair, and from it, sweeping to the end of her train, fell fold after fold of soft tulle. She arranged the coronet carefully with small pearl-topped pins. Then she rose and put her hands on Sidney's shoulders.

"The simple truth is," she said quietly, "that I might hold Palmer if I cared — terribly. I don't

And I'm afraid he knows it. It's my pride that's hurt, nothing else."

And thus did Christine Lorenz go down to her wedding.

Sidney stood for a moment, her eyes on the letter she held. Already, in her new philosophy, she had learned many strange things. One of them was this: that women like Grace Irving did not betray their lovers; that the code of the underworld was "death to the squealer"; that one played the game, and won or lost, and if he lost, took his medicine. If not Grace, then who? Somebody else in the hospital who knew her story, of course. But who? And again — why?

Before going downstairs, Sidney placed the letter in a saucer and set fire to it with a match. Some of the radiance had died out of her eyes.

The Street voted the wedding a great success. The alley, however, was rather confused by certain things. For instance, it regarded the awning as essentially for the carriage guests, and showed a tendency to duck in under the side when no one was looking. Mrs. Rosenfeld absolutely refused to take the usher's arm which was offered her, and said she guessed she was able to walk up alone.

Johnny Rosenfeld came, as befitted his position, in a complete chauffeur's outfit of leather cap and leggings, with the shield that was his State license pinned over his heart.

The Street came decorously, albeit with a degree of uncertainty as to supper. Should they put something on the stove before they left, in case only ice-cream and cake were served at the house? Or was it just as well to trust to luck, and, if the Lorenz supper proved inadequate, to sit down to a cold snack when they got home?

To K., sitting in the back of the church between Harriet and Anna, the wedding was Sidney — Sidney only. He watched her first steps down the aisle, saw her chin go up as she gained poise and confidence, watched the swinging of her young figure in its gauzy white as she passed him and went forward past the long rows of craning necks. Afterward he could not remember the wedding party at all. The service for him was Sidney, rather awed and very serious, beside the altar. It was Sidney who came down the aisle to the triumphant strains of the wedding march, Sidney with Max beside her!

On his right sat Harriet, having reached the first pinnacle of her new career. The wedding gowns were successful. They were more than that — they were triumphant. Sitting there, she cast comprehensive eyes over the church, filled with potential brides.

To Harriet, then, that October afternoon was a future of endless lace and chiffon, the joy of creation, triumph eclipsing triumph. But to Anna, watching the ceremony with blurred eyes and ineffectual bluish lips, was coming her hour. Sitting back in the pew, with her hands folded over her prayer-book, she

said a little prayer for her straight young daughter, facing out from the altar with clear, unafraid eyes.

As Sidney and Max drew near the door, Joe Drummond, who had been standing at the back of the church, turned quickly and went out. He stumbled rather, as if he could not see.

CHAPTER XIV

THE supper at the White Springs Hotel had not been the last supper Carlotta Harrison and Max Wilson had taken together. Carlotta had selected for her vacation a small town within easy motoring distance of the city, and two or three times during her two weeks off duty Wilson had gone out to see her. He liked being with her. She stimulated him. For once that he could see Sidney, he saw Carlotta twice.

She had kept the affair well in hand. She was playing for high stakes. She knew quite well the kind of man with whom she was dealing — that he would pay as little as possible. But she knew, too, that, let him want a thing enough, he would pay any price for it, even marriage.

She was very skillful. The very ardor in her face was in her favor. Behind her hot eyes lurked cold calculation. She would put the thing through, and show those puling nurses, with their pious eyes and evening prayers, a thing or two.

During that entire vacation he never saw her in anything more elaborate than the simplest of white dresses modestly open at the throat, sleeves rolled up to show her satiny arms. There were no other boarders at the little farmhouse. She sat for hours

in the summer evenings in the square yard filled with apple trees that bordered the highway, carefully posed over a book, but with her keen eyes always on the road. She read Browning, Emerson, Swinburne. Once he found her with a book that she hastily concealed. He insisted on seeing it, and secured it. It was a book on brain surgery. Confronted with it, she blushed and dropped her eyes.

His delighted vanity found in it the most insidious of compliments, as she had intended.

"I feel such an idiot when I am with you," she said. "I wanted to know a little more about the things you do."

That put their relationship on a new and advanced basis. Thereafter he occasionally talked surgery instead of sentiment. He found her responsive, intelligent. His work, a sealed book to his women before, lay open to her.

Now and then their professional discussions ended in something different. The two lines of their interest converged.

"Gad!" he said one day. "I look forward to these evenings. I can talk shop with you without either shocking or nauseating you. You are the most intelligent woman I know — and one of the prettiest."

He had stopped the machine on the crest of a hill for the ostensible purpose of admiring the view.

"As long as you talk shop," she said, "I feel that

there is nothing wrong in our being together; but when you say the other thing —"

"Is it wrong to tell a pretty woman you admire her?"

"Under our circumstances, yes."

He twisted himself around in the seat and sat looking at her.

"The loveliest mouth in the world!" he said, and kissed her suddenly.

She had expected it for at least a week, but her surprise was well done. Well done also was her silence during the homeward ride.

No, she was not angry, she said. It was only that e had set her thinking. When she got out of the car she bade him good-night and good-bye. He only laughed.

"Don't you trust me?" he said, leaning out to her

She raised her dark eyes.

"It is not that. I do not trust myself."

After that nothing could have kept him away, and she knew it.

"Man demands both danger and play; therefore he selects woman as the most dangerous of toys." A spice of danger had entered into their relationship It had become infinitely piquant.

He motored out to the farm the next day, to be told that Miss Harrison had gone for a long walk and had not said when she would be back. That pleased him. Evidently she was frightened. Every man likes to think that he is a bit of a devil. D"

Max settled his tie, and, leaving his car outside the whitewashed fence, departed blithely on foot in the direction Carlotta had taken.

She knew her man, of course. He found her, face down, under a tree, looking pale and worn and bearing all the evidence of a severe mental struggle. She rose in confusion when she heard his step, and retreated a foot or two, with her hands out before her.

"How dare you?" she cried. "How dare you follow me! I — I have got to have a little time alone. I have got to think things out."

He knew it was play-acting, but rather liked it; and, because he was quite as skillful as she was, he struck a match on the trunk of the tree and lighted a cigarette before he answered.

"I was afraid of this," he said, playing up. "You take it entirely too hard. I am not really a villain, Carlotta."

It was the first time he had used her name.

"Sit down and let us talk things over."

She sat down at a safe distance, and looked across the little clearing to him with the somber eyes that were her great asset.

"You can afford to be very calm," she said, "because this is only play to you. I know it. I've known it all along. I'm a good listener and not — unattractive. But what is play for you is not necessarily play for me. I am going away from here."

For the first time, he found himself believing in her sincerity. Why, the girl was white. He did n't

want to hurt her. If she cried — he was at the mercy of any woman who cried.

"Give up your training?"

"What else can I do? This sort of thing cannot go on, Dr. Max."

She did cry then — real tears; and he went over beside her and took her in his arms.

"Don't do that," he said. "Please don't do that. You make me feel like a scoundrel, and I 've only been taking a little bit of happiness. That's all. I swear it."

She lifted her head from his shoulder.

"You mean you are happy with me?"

"Very, very happy," said Dr. Max, and kissed her again on the lips.

The one element Carlotta had left out of her calculations was herself. She had known the man, had taken the situation at its proper value. But she had left out this important factor in the equation, — that factor which in every relationship between man and woman determines the equation, — the woman.

Into her calculating ambition had come a new and destroying element. She who, like K. in his little room on the Street, had put aside love and the things thereof, found that it would not be put aside. By the end of her short vacation Carlotta Harrison was wildly in love with the younger Wilson.

They continued to meet, not as often as before, but once a week, perhaps. The meetings were full

of danger now; and if for the girl they lost by this quality, they gained attraction for the man. She was shrewd enough to realize her own situation. The thing had gone wrong. She cared, and he did not. It was his game now, not hers.

All women are intuitive; women in love are dangerously so. As well as she knew that his passion for her was not the real thing, so also she realized that there was growing up in his heart something akin to the real thing for Sidney Page. Suspicion became certainty after a talk they had over the supper-table at a country road-house the day after Christine's wedding.

"How was the wedding — tiresome?" she asked.

"Thrilling! There's always something thrilling to me in a man tying himself up for life to one woman. It's — it's so reckless."

Her eyes narrowed. "That's not exactly the Law and the Prophets, is it?"

"It's the truth. To think of selecting out of all the world one woman, and electing to spend the rest of one's days with her! Although —"

His eyes looked past Carlotta into distance.

"Sidney Page was one of the bridesmaids," he said irrelevantly. "She was lovelier than the bride."

"Pretty, but stupid," said Carlotta. "I like her. I've really tried to teach her things, but — you know — " She shrugged her shoulders.

Dr. Max was learning wisdom. If there was a twinkle in his eye, he veiled it discreetly. But, once

again in the machine, he bent over and put his cheek against hers.

"You little cat! You're jealous," he said exultantly.

Nevertheless, although he might smile, the image of Sidney lay very close to his heart those autumn days. And Carlotta knew it.

Sidney came off night duty the middle of November. The night duty had been a time of comparative peace to Carlotta. There were no evenings when Dr. Max could bring Sidney back to the hospital in his car.

Sidney's half-days at home were occasions for agonies of jealousy on Carlotta's part. On such an occasion, a month after the wedding, she could not contain herself. She pleaded her old excuse of headache, and took the trolley to a point near the end of the Street. After twilight fell, she slowly walked the length of the Street. Christine and Palmer had not returned from their wedding journey. The November evening was not cold, and on the little balcony sat Sidney and Dr. Max. K. was there, too, had she only known it, sitting back in the shadow and saying little, his steady eyes on Sidney's profile.

But this Carlotta did not know. She went on down the Street in a frenzy of jealous anger.

After that two ideas ran concurrent in Carlotta's mind: one was to get Sidney out of the way; the

other was to make Wilson propose to her. In her heart she knew that on the first depended the second.

A week later she made the same frantic excursion, but with a different result. Sidney was not in sight, or Wilson. But standing on the wooden doorstep of the little house was Le Moyne. The ailanthus trees were bare at that time, throwing gaunt arms upward to the November sky. The street-lamp, which in the summer left the doorstep in the shadow, now shone through the branches and threw into strong relief Le Moyne's tall figure and set face. Carlotta saw him too late to retreat. But he did not see her. She went on, startled, her busy brain scheming anew. Another element had entered into her plotting. It was the first time she had known that K. lived in the Page house. It gave her a sense of uncertainty and deadly fear.

She made her first friendly overture of many days to Sidney the following day. They met in the locker-room in the basement where the street clothing for the ward patients was kept. Here, rolled in bundles and ticketed, side by side lay the heterogeneous garments in which the patients had met accident or illness. Rags and tidiness, filth and cleanliness, lay almost touching.

Far away on the other side of the white-washed basement, men were unloading gleaming cans of milk. Floods of sunlight came down the cellar-way, touching their white coats and turning the

cans to silver. Everywhere was the religion of the hospital, which is order.

Sidney, harking back from recent slights to the staircase conversations of her night duty, smiled at Carlotta cheerfully.

"A miracle is happening," she said. "Grace Irving is going out to-day. When one remembers how ill she was and how we thought she could not live, it's rather a triumph, is n't it?"

"Are those her clothes?"

Sidney examined with some dismay the elaborate negligée garments in her hand.

"She can't go out in those; I shall have to lend her something." A little of the light died out of her face. "She's had a hard fight, and she has won," she said. "But when I think of what she's probably going back to —"

Carlotta shrugged her shoulders.

"It's all in the day's work," she observed indifferently. "You can take them up into the kitchen and give them steady work paring potatoes, or put them in the laundry ironing. In the end it's the same thing. They all go back."

She drew a package from the locker and looked at it ruefully.

"Well, what do you know about this? Here's a woman who came in in a nightgown and pair of slippers. And now she wants to go out in half an hour!"

She turned, on her way out of the locker-room, and shot a quick glance at Sidney.

"I happened to be on your street the other night," she said. "You live across the street from Wilsons', don't you?"

"Yes."

"I thought so; I had heard you speak of the house. Your—your brother was standing on the steps."

Sidney laughed.

"I have no brother. That's a roomer, a Mr. Le Moyne. It is n't really right to call him a roomer; he's one of the family now."

"Le Moyne!"

He had even taken another name. It had hit him hard, for sure.

K.'s name had struck an always responsive chord in Sidney. The two girls went toward the elevator together. With a very little encouragement, Sidney talked of K. She was pleased at Miss Harrison's friendly tone, glad that things were all right between them again. At her floor, she put a timid hand on the girl's arm.

"I was afraid I had offended you or displeased you," she said. "I'm so glad it is n't so."

Carlotta shivered under her hand.

Things were not going any too well with K. True, he had received his promotion at the office, and with this present affluence of twenty-two dollars a week he was able to do several things. Mrs. Rosenfeld now washed and ironed one day a week at the little house, so that Katie might have more time to look

after Anna. He had increased also the amount of money that he periodically sent East.

So far, well enough. The thing that rankled and filled him with a sense of failure was Max Wilson's attitude. It was not unfriendly; it was, indeed, consistently respectful, almost reverential. But he clearly considered Le Moyne's position absurd.

There was no true comradeship between the two men; but there was beginning to be constant association, and lately a certain amount of friction. They thought differently about almost everything.

Wilson began to bring all his problems to Le Moyne. There were long consultations in that small upper room. Perhaps more than one man or woman who did not know of K.'s existence owed his life to him that fall.

Under K.'s direction, Max did marvels. Cases began to come in to him from the surrounding towns. To his own daring was added a new and remarkable technique. But Le Moyne, who had found resignation if not content, was once again in touch with the work he loved. There were times when, having thrashed a case out together and outlined the next day's work for Max, he would walk for hours into the night out over the hills, fighting his battle. The longing was on him to be in the thick of things again. The thought of the gas office and its deadly round sickened him.

It was on one of his long walks that K. found Tillie.

It was December then, gray and raw, with a wet snow that changed to rain as it fell. The country roads were ankle-deep with mud, the wayside paths thick with sodden leaves. The dreariness of the countryside that Saturday afternoon suited his mood. He had ridden to the end of the street-car line, and started his walk from there. As was his custom, he wore no overcoat, but a short sweater under his coat. Somewhere along the road he had picked up a mongrel dog, and, as if in sheer desire for human society, it trotted companionably at his heels.

Seven miles from the end of the car line he found a road-house, and stopped in for a glass of Scotch. He was chilled through. The dog went in with him, and stood looking up into his face. It was as if he submitted, but wondered why this indoors, with the scents of the road ahead and the trails of rabbits over the fields.

The house was set in a valley at the foot of two hills. Through the mist of the December afternoon, it had loomed pleasantly before him. The door was ajar, and he stepped into a little hall covered with ingrain carpet. To the right was the dining-room, the table covered with a white cloth, and in its exact center an uncompromising bunch of dried flowers. To the left, the typical parlor of such places. It might have been the parlor of the White Springs Hotel in duplicate, plush self-rocker and all. Over everything was silence and a pervading smell of

fresh varnish. The house was aggressive with new paint — the sagging old floors shone with it, the doors gleamed.

"Hello!" called K.

There were slow footsteps upstairs, the closing of a bureau drawer, the rustle of a woman's dress coming down the stairs. K., standing uncertainly on a carpet oasis that was the center of the parlor varnish, stripped off his sweater.

"Not very busy here this afternoon!" he said to the unseen female on the staircase. Then he saw her. It was Tillie. She put a hand against the door-frame to steady herself. Tillie surely, but a new Tillie! With her hair loosened around her face, a fresh blue chintz dress open at the throat, a black velvet bow on her breast, here was a Tillie fuller, infinitely more attractive, than he had remembered her. But she did not smile at him. There was something about her eyes not unlike the dog's expression, submissive, but questioning.

"Well, you've found me, Mr. Le Moyne." And, when he held out his hand, smiling: "I just had to do it, Mr. K."

"And how's everything going? You look mighty fine and — happy, Tillie."

"I'm all right. Mr. Schwitter's gone to the post-office. He'll be back at five. Will you have a cup of tea, or will you have something else?"

The instinct of the Street was still strong in Tillie The Street did not approve of "something else."

"Scotch-and-soda," said Le Moyne. "And shall I buy a ticket for you to punch?"

But she only smiled faintly. He was sorry he had made the blunder. Evidently the Street and all that pertained was a sore subject.

So this was Tillie's new home! It was for this that she had exchanged the virginal integrity of her life at Mrs. McKee's — for this wind-swept little house, tidily ugly, infinitely lonely. There were two crayon enlargements over the mantel. One was Schwitter, evidently. The other was the paper-doll wife. K. wondered what curious instinct of self-abnegation had caused Tillie to leave the wife there undisturbed. Back of its position of honor he saw the girl's realization of her own situation. On a wooden shelf, exactly between the two pictures, was another vase of dried flowers.

Tillie brought the Scotch, already mixed, in a tall glass. K. would have preferred to mix it himself, but the Scotch was good. He felt a new respect for Mr. Schwitter.

"You gave me a turn at first," said Tillie. "But I am right glad to see you, Mr. Le Moyne. Now that the roads are bad, nobody comes very much. It's lonely."

Until now, K. and Tillie, when they met, had met conversationally on the common ground of food. They no longer had that, and between them both lay like a barrier their last conversation.

"Are you happy, Tillie?" said K. suddenly

"I expected you'd ask me that. I've been thinking what to say."

Her reply set him watching her face. More attractive it certainly was, but happy? There was a wistfulness about Tillie's mouth that set him wondering.

"Is he good to you?"

"He's about the best man on earth. He's never said a cross word to me — even at first, when I was panicky and scared at every sound."

Le Moyne nodded understandingly.

"I burned a lot of victuals when I first came, running off and hiding when I heard people around the place. It used to seem to me that what I'd done was written on my face. But he never said a word."

"That's over now?"

"I don't run. I am still frightened."

"Then it has been worth while?"

Tillie glanced up at the two pictures over the mantel.

"Sometimes it is — when he comes in tired, and I've a chicken ready or some fried ham and eggs for his supper, and I see him begin to look rested. He lights his pipe, and many an evening he helps me with the dishes. He's happy; he's getting fat."

"But you?" Le Moyne persisted.

"I would n't go back to where I was, but I am not happy, Mr. Le Moyne. There's no use pretending.

I want a baby. All along I've wanted a baby. He wants one. This place is his, and he'd like a boy to come into it when he's gone. But, my God! if I did have one, what would it be?"

K.'s eyes followed hers to the picture and the everlastings underneath.

"And she — there is n't any prospect of her —?"

"No."

There was no solution to Tillie's problem. Le Moyne, standing on the hearth and looking down at her, realized that, after all, Tillie must work out her own salvation. He could offer her no comfort.

They talked far into the growing twilight of the afternoon. Tillie was hungry for news of the Street: must know of Christine's wedding, of Harriet, of Sidney in her hospital. And when he had told her all, she sat silent, rolling her handkerchief in her fingers. Then: —

"Take the four of us," she said suddenly, — "Christine Lorenz and Sidney Page and Miss Harriet and me, — and which one would you have picked to go wrong like this? I guess, from the looks of things, most folks would have thought it would be the Lorenz girl. They'd have picked Harriet Kennedy for the hospital, and me for the dressmaking, and it would have been Sidney Page that got married and had an automobile. Well, that's life."

She looked up at K. shrewdly.

"There were some people out here lately. They did n't know me, and I heard them talking. They

said Sidney Page was going to marry Dr. Max Wilson."

"Possibly. I believe there is no engagement yet."

He had finished with his glass. Tillie rose to take it away. As she stood before him she looked up into his face.

"If you like her as well as I think you do, Mr. Le Moyne, you won't let him get her."

"I am afraid that's not up to me, is it? What would I do with a wife, Tillie?"

"You'd be faithful to her. That's more than he would be. I guess, in the long run, that would count more than money."

That was what K. took home with him after his encounter with Tillie. He pondered it on his way back to the street-car, as he struggled against the wind. The weather had changed. Wagon-tracks along the road were filled with water and had begun to freeze. The rain had turned to a driving sleet that cut his face. Halfway to the trolley line, the dog turned off into a by-road. K. did not miss him. The dog stared after him, one foot raised. Once again his eyes were like Tillie's, as she had waved good-bye from the porch.

His head sunk on his breast, K. covered miles of road with his long, swinging pace, and fought his battle. Was Tillie right, after all, and had he been wrong? Why should he efface himself, if it meant Sidney's unhappiness? Why not accept Wilson's offer and start over again? Then if things went

well — the temptation was strong that stormy afternoon. He put it from him at last, because of the conviction that whatever he did would make no change in Sidney's ultimate decision. If she cared enough for Wilson, she would marry him. He felt that she cared enough.

CHAPTER XV

PALMER and Christine returned from their wedding trip the day K. discovered Tillie. Anna Page made much of the arrival, insisted on dinner for them that night at the little house, must help Christine unpack her trunks and arrange her wedding gifts about the apartment. She was brighter than she had been for days, more interested. The wonders of the trousseau filled her with admiration and a sort of jealous envy for Sidney, who could have none of these things. In a pathetic sort of way, she mothered Christine in lieu of her own daughter.

And it was her quick eye that discerned something wrong. Christine was not quite happy. Under her excitement was an undercurrent of reserve. Anna, rich in maternity if in nothing else, felt it, and in reply to some speech of Christine's that struck her as hard, not quite fitting, she gave her a gentle admonishing.

"Married life takes a little adjusting, my dear," she said. "After we have lived to ourselves for a number of years, it is not easy to live for some one else."

Christine straightened from the tea-table she was arranging.

"That's true, of course. But why should the woman do all the adjusting?"

"Men are more set," said poor Anna, who had never been set in anything in her life. "It is harder for them to give in. And, of course, Palmer is older, and his habits —"

"The less said about Palmer's habits the better," flashed Christine. "I appear to have married a bunch of habits."

She gave over her unpacking, and sat down listlessly by the fire, while Anna moved about, busy with the small activities that delighted her.

Six weeks of Palmer's society in unlimited amounts had bored Christine to distraction. She sat with folded hands and looked into a future that seemed to include nothing but Palmer: Palmer asleep with his mouth open; Palmer shaving before breakfast, and irritable until he had had his coffee; Palmer yawning over the newspaper.

And there was a darker side to the picture than that. There was a vision of Palmer slipping quietly into his room and falling into the heavy sleep, not of drunkenness perhaps, but of drink. That had happened twice. She knew now that it would happen again and again, as long as he lived. Drinking leads to other things. The letter she had received on her wedding day was burned into her brain. There would be that in the future too, probably.

Christine was not without courage. She was making a brave clutch at happiness. But that afternoon of the first day at home she was terrified. She

was glad when Anna went and left her alone by her fire.

But when she heard a step in the hall, she opened the door herself. She had determined to meet Palmer with a smile. Tears brought nothing; she had learned that already. Men liked smiling women and good cheer. "Daughters of joy," they called girls like the one on the Avenue. So she opened the door smiling.

But it was K. in the hall. She waited while, with his back to her, he shook himself like a great dog. When he turned, she was watching him.

"You!" said Le Moyne. "Why, welcome home."

He smiled down at her, his kindly eyes lighting.

"It's good to be home and to see you again. Won't you come in to my fire?"

"I'm wet."

"All the more reason why you should come," she cried gayly, and held the door wide.

The little parlor was cheerful with fire and soft lamps, bright with silver vases full of flowers. K. stepped inside and took a critical survey of the room.

"Well!" he said. "Between us we have made a pretty good job of this, I with the paper and the wiring, and you with your pretty furnishings and your pretty self."

He glanced at her appreciatively. Christine saw his approval, and was happier than she had been for weeks. She put on the thousand little airs and graces

that were a part of her — held her chin high, looked up at him with the little appealing glances that she had found were wasted on Palmer. She lighted the spirit-lamp to make tea, drew out the best chair for him, and patted a cushion with her well-cared-for hands.

"A big chair for a big man!" she said. "And see, here's a footstool."

"I am ridiculously fond of being babied," said K., and quite basked in his new atmosphere of well-being. This was better than his empty room upstairs, than tramping along country roads, than his own thoughts.

"And now, how is everything?" asked Christine from across the fire. "Do tell me all the scandal of the Street."

"There has been no scandal since you went away," said K. And, because each was glad not to be left to his own thoughts, they laughed at this bit of unconscious humor.

"Seriously," said Le Moyne, "we have been very quiet. I have had my salary raised and am now rejoicing in twenty-two dollars a week. I am still not accustomed to it. Just when I had all my ideas fixed for fifteen, I get twenty-two and have to reassemble them. I am disgustingly rich."

"It is very disagreeable when one's income becomes a burden," said Christine gravely.

She was finding in Le Moyne something that she needed just then — a solidity, a sort of dependa-

oility, that had nothing to do with heaviness. She felt that here was a man she could trust, almost confide in. She liked his long hands, his shabby but well-cut clothes, his fine profile with its strong chin. She left off her little affectations, — a tribute to his own lack of them, — and sat back in her chair, watching the fire.

When K. chose, he could talk well. The Howes had been to Bermuda on their wedding trip. He knew Bermuda; that gave them a common ground. Christine relaxed under his steady voice. As for K., he frankly enjoyed the little visit — drew himself at last with regret out of his chair.

"You've been very nice to ask me in, Mrs. Howe," he said. "I hope you will allow me to come again. But, of course, you are going to be very gay."

It seemed to Christine she would never be gay again. She did not want him to go away. The sound of his deep voice gave her a sense of security. She liked the clasp of the hand he held out to her, when at last he made a move toward the door.

"Tell Mr. Howe I am sorry he missed our little party," said Le Moyne. "And — thank you."

"Will you come again?" asked Christine rather wistfully.

"Just as often as you ask me."

As he closed the door behind him, there was a new light in Christine's eyes. Things were not right, but, after all, they were not hopeless. One might still have friends, big and strong, steady of eye and

voice. When Palmer came home, the smile she gave him was not forced.

The day's exertion had been bad for Anna. Le Moyne found her on the couch in the transformed sewing-room, and gave her a quick glance of apprehension. She was propped up high with pillows, with a bottle of aromatic ammonia beside her.

"Just — short of breath," she panted. "I — I must get down. Sidney — is coming home — to supper; and — the others — Palmer and —"

That was as far as she got. K., watch in hand, found her pulse thin, stringy, irregular. He had been prepared for some such emergency, and he hurried into his room for amyl-nitrate. When he came back she was almost unconscious. There was no time even to call Katie. He broke the capsule in a towel, and held it over her face. After a time the spasm relaxed, but her condition remained alarming.

Harriet, who had come home by that time, sat by the couch and held her sister's hand. Only once in the next hour or so did she speak. They had sent for Dr. Ed, but he had not come yet. Harriet was too wretched to notice the professional manner in which K. set to work over Anna.

"I've been a very hard sister to her," she said. "If you can pull her through, I'll try to make up for it."

Christine sat on the stairs outside, frightened and helpless. They had sent for Sidney; but the little

house had no telephone, and the message was slow in getting off.

At six o'clock Dr. Ed came panting up the stairs and into the room. K. stood back.

"Well, this is sad, Harriet," said Dr. Ed. "Why in the name of Heaven, when I was n't around, did n't you get another doctor. If she had had some amyl-nitrate —"

"I gave her some nitrate of amyl," said K. quietly. "There was really no time to send for anybody. She almost went under at half-past five."

Max had kept his word, and even Dr. Ed did not suspect K.'s secret. He gave a quick glance at this tall young man who spoke so quietly of what he had done for the sick woman, and went on with his work.

Sidney arrived a little after six, and from that moment the confusion in the sick-room was at an end. She moved Christine from the stairs, where Katie on her numerous errands must crawl over her; set Harriet to warming her mother's bed and getting it ready; opened windows, brought order and quiet. And then, with death in her eyes, she took up her position beside her mother. This was no time for weeping; that would come later. Once she turned to K., standing watchfully beside her.

"I think you have known this for a long time," she said. And, when he did not answer: "Why did you let me stay away from her? It would have been such a little time!"

"We were trying to do our best for both of you," he replied.

Anna was unconscious and sinking fast. One thought obsessed Sidney. She repeated it over and over. It came as a cry from the depths of the girl's new experience.

"She has had so little of life," she said, over and over. "So little! Just this Street. She never knew anything else."

And finally K. took it up.

"After all, Sidney," he said, "the Street *is* life: the world is only many streets. She had a great deal. She had love and content, and she had you."

Anna died a little after midnight, a quiet passing, so that only Sidney and the two men knew when she went away. It was Harriet who collapsed. During all that long evening she had sat looking back over years of small unkindnesses. The thorn of Anna's inefficiency had always rankled in her flesh. She had been hard, uncompromising, thwarted. And now it was forever too late.

K. had watched Sidney carefully. Once he thought she was fainting, and went to her. But she shook her head.

"I am all right. Do you think you could get them all out of the room and let me have her alone for just a few minutes?"

He cleared the room, and took up his vigil outside the door. And, as he stood there, he thought of what he had said to Sidney about the Street. It was a

world of its own. Here in this very house were death and separation; Harriet's starved life; Christine and Palmer beginning a long and doubtful future together; himself, a failure, and an impostor.

When he opened the door again, Sidney was standing by her mother's bed. He went to her, and she turned and put her head against his shoulder like a tired child.

"Take me away, K.," she said pitifully.

And, with his arm around her, he led her out of the room.

Outside of her small immediate circle Anna's death was hardly felt. The little house went on much as before. Harriet carried back to her business a heaviness of spirit that made it difficult to bear with the small irritations of her day. Perhaps Anna's incapacity, which had always annoyed her, had been physical. She must have had her trouble a long time. She remembered other women of the Street who had crept through inefficient days, and had at last laid down their burdens and closed their mild eyes, to the lasting astonishment of their families. What did they think about, these women, as they pottered about? Did they resent the impatience that met their lagging movements, the indifference that would not see how they were failing? Hot tears fell on Harriet's fashion-book as it lay on her knee, not only for Anna — for Anna's prototypes everywhere.

On Sidney — and in less measure, of course, on K. — fell the real brunt of the disaster. Sidney kept up well until after the funeral, but went down the next day with a low fever.

"Overwork and grief," Dr. Ed said, and sternly forbade the hospital again until Christmas. Morning and evening K. stopped at her door and inquired for her, and morning and evening came Sidney's reply: —

"Much better. I'll surely be up to-morrow."

But the days dragged on and she did not get about.

Downstairs, Christine and Palmer had entered on the round of midwinter gayeties. Palmer's "crowd" was a lively one. There were dinners and dances, week-end excursions to country-houses. The Street grew accustomed to seeing automobiles stop before the little house at all hours of the night. Johnny Rosenfeld, driving Palmer's car, took to falling asleep at the wheel in broad daylight, and voiced his discontent to his mother.

"You never know where you are with them guys," he said briefly. "We start out for half an hour's run in the evening, and get home with the milk-wagons. And the more some of them have had to drink, the more they want to drive the machine. If I get a chance, I'm going to beat it while the wind's my way."

But, talk as he might, in Johnny Rosenfeld's loyal heart there was no thought of desertion.

Palmer had given him a man's job, and he would stick by it, no matter what came.

There were some things that Johnny Rosenfeld did not tell his mother. There were evenings when the Howe car was filled, not with Christine and her friends, but with women of a different world; evenings when the destination was not a country estate, but a road-house; evenings when Johnny Rosenfeld, ousted from the driver's seat by some drunken youth, would hold tight to the swinging car and say such fragments of prayers as he could remember. Johnny Rosenfeld, who had started life with few illusions, was in danger of losing such as he had.

One such night Christine put in, lying wakefully in her bed, while the clock on the mantel tolled hour after hour into the night. Palmer did not come home at all. He sent a note from the office in the morning: —

"I hope you are not worried, darling. The car broke down near the Country Club last night, and there was nothing to do but to spend the night there. I would have sent you word, but I did not want to rouse you. What do you say to the theater to-night and supper afterward?"

Christine was learning. She telephoned the Country Club that morning, and found that Palmer had not been there. But, although she knew now that he was deceiving her, as he always had deceived

her, as probably he always would, she hesitated to confront him with what she knew. She shrank, as many a woman has shrunk before, from confronting him with his lie.

But the second time it happened, she was roused. It was almost Christmas then, and Sidney was well on the way to recovery, thinner and very white, but going slowly up and down the staircase on K.'s arm, and sitting with Harriet and K. at the dinner-table. She was begging to be back on duty for Christmas, and K. felt that he would have to give her up soon.

At three o'clock one morning Sidney roused from a light sleep to hear a rapping on her door.

"Is that you, Aunt Harriet?" she called.

"It's Christine. May I come in?"

Sidney unlocked her door. Christine slipped into the room. She carried a candle, and before she spoke she looked at Sidney's watch on the bedside table.

"I hoped my clock was wrong," she said. "I am sorry to waken you, Sidney, but I don't know what to do."

"Are you ill?"

"No. Palmer has not come home."

"What time is it?"

"After three o'clock."

Sidney had lighted the gas and was throwing on her dressing-gown.

"When he went out did he say —"

"He said nothing. We had been quarreling. Sidney, I am going home in the morning."

"You don't mean that, do you?"

"Don't I look as if I mean it? How much of this sort of thing is a woman supposed to endure?"

"Perhaps he has been delayed. These things always seem terrible in the middle of the night, but by morning —"

Christine whirled on her.

"This is n't the first time. You remember the letter I got on my wedding day?"

"Yes."

"He's gone back to her."

"Christine! Oh, I am sure you're wrong. He's devoted to you. I don't believe it!"

"Believe it or not," said Christine doggedly, "that's exactly what has happened. I got something out of that little rat of a Rosenfeld boy, and the rest I know because I know Palmer. He's out with her to-night."

The hospital had taught Sidney one thing: that it took many people to make a world, and that out of these some were inevitably vicious. But vice had remained for her a clear abstraction. There were such people, and because one was in the world for service one cared for them. Even the Saviour had been kind to the woman of the streets.

But here abruptly Sidney found the great injustice of the world — that because of this vice the good

suffer more than the wicked. Her young spirit rose in hot rebellion.

"It is n't fair!" she cried. "It makes me hate all the men in the world. Palmer cares for you, and yet he can do a thing like this!"

Christine was pacing nervously up and down the room. Mere companionship had soothed her. She was now, on the surface at least, less excited than Sidney.

"They are not all like Palmer, thank Heaven," she said. "There are decent men. My father is one, and your K., here in the house, is another."

At four o'clock in the morning Palmer Howe came home. Christine met him in the lower hall. He was rather pale, but entirely sober. She confronted him in her straight white gown and waited for him to speak.

"I am sorry to be so late, Chris," he said. "The fact is, I am all in. I was driving the car out Seven Mile Run. We blew out a tire and the thing turned over."

Christine noticed then that his right arm was hanging inert by his side.

CHAPTER XVI

YOUNG Howe had been firmly resolved to give up all his bachelor habits with his wedding day. In his indolent, rather selfish way, he was much in love with his wife.

But with the inevitable misunderstandings of the first months of marriage had come a desire to be appreciated once again at his face value. Grace had taken him, not for what he was, but for what he seemed to be. With Christine the veil was rent. She knew him now — all his small indolences, his affectations, his weaknesses. Later on, like other women since the world began, she would learn to dissemble, to affect to believe him what he was not.

Grace had learned this lesson long ago. It was the A B C of her knowledge. And so, back to Grace six weeks after his wedding day came Palmer Howe, not with a suggestion to renew the old relationship, but for comradeship.

Christine sulked — he wanted good cheer; Christine was intolerant — he wanted tolerance; she disapproved of him and showed her disapproval — he wanted approval. He wanted life to be comfortable and cheerful, without recriminations, a little work and much play, a drink when one was thirsty. Distorted though it was, and founded on a wrong

basis, perhaps, deep in his heart Palmer's only longing was for happiness; but this happiness must be of an active sort — not content, which is passive, but enjoyment.

"Come on out," he said. "I've got a car now. No taxi working its head off for us. Just a little run over the country roads, eh?"

It was the afternoon of the day before Christine's night visit to Sidney. The office had been closed, owing to a death, and Palmer was in possession of a holiday.

"Come on," he coaxed. "We'll go out to the Climbing Rose and have supper."

"I don't want to go."

"That's not true, Grace, and you know it."

"You and I are through."

"It's your doing, not mine. The roads are frozen hard; an hour's run into the country will bring your color back."

"Much you care about that. Go and ride with your wife," said the girl, and flung away from him.

The last few weeks had filled out her thin figure, but she still bore traces of her illness. Her short hair was curled over her head. She looked curiously boyish, almost sexless.

Because she saw him wince when she mentioned Christine, her ill temper increased. She showed her teeth.

"You get out of here," she said suddenly. "I didn't ask you to come back. I don't want you."

"Good Heavens, Grace! You always knew I would have to marry some day."

"I was sick; I nearly died. I did n't hear any reports of you hanging around the hospital to learn how I was getting along."

He laughed rather sheepishly.

"I had to be careful. You know that as well as I do. I know half the staff there. Besides, one of —" He hesitated over his wife's name. "A girl I know very well was in the training-school. There would have been the devil to pay if I 'd as much as called up."

"You never told me you were going to get married."

Cornered, he slipped an arm around her. But she shook him off.

"I meant to tell you, honey; but you got sick. Anyhow, I — I hated to tell you, honey."

He had furnished the flat for her. There was a comfortable feeling of coming home about going there again. And, now that the worst minute of their meeting was over, he was visibly happier. But Grace continued to stand eyeing him somberly.

"I 've got something to tell you," she said. "Don't have a fit, and don't laugh. If you do, I 'll — I 'll jump out of the window. I 've got a place in a store. I 'm going to be straight, Palmer."

"Good for you!"

He meant it. She was a nice girl and he was fond of her. The other was a dog's life. And he was not

unselfish about it. She could not belong to him. He did not want her to belong to any one else.

"One of the nurses in the hospital, a Miss Page, has got me something to do at Linton and Hofburg's. I am going on for the January white sale. If I make good they will keep me."

He had put her aside without a qualm; and now he met her announcement with approval. He meant to let her alone. They would have a holiday together, and then they would say good-bye. And she had not fooled him. She still cared. He was getting off well, all things considered. She might have raised a row.

"Good work!" he said. "You'll be a lot happier. But that isn't any reason why we should n't be friends, is it? Just friends; I mean that. I would like to feel that I can stop in now and then and say how do you do."

"I promised Miss Page."

"Never mind Miss Page."

The mention of Sidney's name brought up in his mind Christine as he had left her that morning. He scowled. Things were not going well at home. There was something wrong with Christine. She used to be a good sport, but she had never been the same since the day of the wedding. He thought her attitude toward him was one of suspicion. It made him uncomfortable. But any attempt on his part to fathom it only met with cold silence. That had been her attitude that morning.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he said. "We won't

go to any of the old places. I've found a new road-house in the country that's respectable enough to suit anybody. We'll go out to Schwitter's and get some dinner. I'll promise to get you back early. How's that?"

In the end she gave in. And on the way out he lived up to the letter of their agreement. The situation exhilarated him: Grace with her new air of virtue, her new aloofness; his comfortable car; Johnny Rosenfeld's discreet back and alert ears.

The adventure had all the thrill of a new conquest in it. He treated the girl with deference, did not insist when she refused a cigarette, felt glowingly virtuous and exultant at the same time.

When the car drew up before the Schwitter place, he slipped a five-dollar bill into Johnny Rosenfeld's not over-clean hand.

"I don't mind the ears," he said. "Just watch your tongue, lad." And Johnny stalled his engine in sheer surprise.

"There's just enough of the Jew in me," said Johnny, "to know how to talk a lot and say nothing, Mr. Howe."

He crawled stiffly out of the car and prepared to crank it.

"I'll just give her the 'once over' now and then." he said. "She'll freeze solid if I let her stand."

Grace had gone up the narrow path to the house. She had the gift of looking well in her clothes, and her small hat with its long quill and her motor-coat

were *chic* and becoming. She never overdressed, as Christine was inclined to do.

. Fortunately for Palmer, Tillie did not see him. A heavy German maid waited at the table in the dining-room, while Tillie baked waffles in the kitchen.

Johnny Rosenfeld, going around the side path to the kitchen door with visions of hot coffee and a country supper for his frozen stomach, saw her through the window bending flushed over the stove, and hesitated. Then, without a word, he tiptoed back to the car again, and, crawling into the tonneau, covered himself with rugs. In his untutored mind were certain great qualities, and loyalty to his employer was one. The five dollars in his pocket had nothing whatever to do with it.

At eighteen he had developed a philosophy of four words. It took the place of the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments, and the Catechism. It was: "Mind your own business."

The discovery of Tillie's hiding-place interested but did not thrill him. Tillie was his cousin. If she wanted to do the sort of thing she was doing, that was her affair. Tillie and her middle-aged lover, Palmer Howe and Grace — the alley was not unfamiliar with such relationships. It viewed them with tolerance until they were found out, when it raised its hands.

True to his promise, Palmer wakened the sleeping boy before nine o'clock. Grace had eaten little

and drunk nothing; but Howe was slightly stimulated.

"Give her the 'once over,'" he told Johnny, "and then go back and crawl into the rugs again. I'll drive in."

Grace sat beside him. Their progress was slow and rough over the country roads, but when they reached the State road Howe threw open the throttle. He drove well. The liquor was in his blood. He took chances and got away with them, laughing at the girl's gasps of dismay.

"Wait until I get beyond Simkinsville," he said, "and I'll let her out. You're going to travel tonight, honey."

The girl sat beside him with her eyes fixed ahead. He had been drinking, and the warmth of the liquor was in his voice. She was determined on one thing. She was going to make him live up to the letter of his promise to go away at the house door; and more and more she realized that it would be difficult. His mood was reckless, masterful. Instead of laughing when she drew back from a proffered caress, he turned surly. Obstinate lines that she remembered appeared from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. She was uneasy.

Finally she hit on a plan to make him stop somewhere in her neighborhood and let her get out of the car. She would not come back after that.

There was another car going toward the city. Now it passed them, and as often they passed it. It be-

came a contest of wits. Palmer's car lost on the hills, but gained on the long level stretches, which gleamed with a coating of thin ice.

"I wish you'd let them get ahead, Palmer. It's silly and it's reckless."

"I told you we'd travel to-night."

He turned a little glance at her. What the deuce was the matter with women, anyhow? Were none of them cheerful any more? Here was Grace as sober as Christine. He felt outraged, defrauded.

His light car skidded and struck the big car heavily. On a smooth road perhaps nothing more serious than broken mudguards would have been the result. But on the ice the small car slewed around and slid over the edge of the bank. At the bottom of the declivity it turned over.

Grace was flung clear of the wreckage. Howe freed himself and stood erect, with one arm hanging at his side. There was no sound at all from the boy under the tonneau.

The big car had stopped. Down the bank plunged a heavy, gorilla-like figure, long arms pushing aside the frozen branches of trees. When he reached the car, O'Hara found Grace sitting unhurt on the ground. In the wreck of the car the lamps had not been extinguished, and by their light he made out Howe, swaying dizzily.

"Anybody underneath?"

"The chauffeur. He's dead, I think. He does n't answer."

The other members of O'Hara's party had crawled down the bank by that time. With the aid of a jack, they got the car up. Johnny Rosenfeld lay doubled on his face underneath. When he came to and opened his eyes, Grace almost shrieked her relief.

"I'm all right," said Johnny Rosenfeld. And, when they offered him whiskey: "Away with the fire-water. I am no drinker. I — I —" A spasm of pain twisted his face. "I guess I'll get up." With his arms he lifted himself to a sitting position, and fell back again.

"God!" he said. "I can't move my legs."

CHAPTER XVII

By Christmas Day Sidney was back in the hospital, a little wan, but valiantly determined to keep her life to its mark of service. She had a talk with K. the night before she left.

Katie was out, and Sidney had put the dining-room in order. K. sat by the table and watched her as she moved about the room.

The past few weeks had been very wonderful to him: to help her up and down the stairs, to read to her in the evenings as she lay on the couch in the sewing-room; later, as she improved, to bring small dainties home for her tray, and, having stood over Katie while she cooked them, to bear them in triumph to that upper room — he had not been so happy in years.

And now it was over. He drew a long breath.

"I hope you don't feel as if you must stay on," she said anxiously. "Not that we don't want you — you know better than that."

"There is no place else in the whole world that I want to go to," he said simply.

"I seem to be always relying on somebody's kindness to — to keep things together. First, for years and years, it was Aunt Harriet; now it is you."

"Don't you realize that, instead of your being

grateful to me, it is I who am undeniably grateful to you? This is home now. I have lived around — in different places and in different ways. I would rather be here than anywhere else in the world."

But he did not look at her. There was so much that was hopeless in his eyes that he did not want her to see. She would be quite capable, he told himself savagely, of marrying him out of sheer pity if she ever guessed. And he was afraid — afraid, since he wanted her so much — that he would be fool and weakling enough to take her even on those terms. So he looked away.

Everything was ready for her return to the hospital. She had been out that day to put flowers on the quiet grave where Anna lay with folded hands; she had made her round of little visits on the Street; and now her suit-case, packed, was in the hall.

"In one way, it will be a little better for you than if Christine and Palmer were not in the house. You like Christine, don't you?"

"Very much."

"She likes you, K. She depends on you, too. especially since that night when you took care of Palmer's arm before we got Dr. Max. I often think, K., what a good doctor you would have been. You knew so well what to do for mother."

She broke off. She still could not trust her voice about her mother.

"Palmer's arm is going to be quite straight. Dr. Ed is so proud of Max over it. It was a bad fracture."

He had been waiting for that. Once at least, whenever they were together, she brought Max into the conversation. She was quite unconscious of it.

"You and Max are great friends. I knew you would like him. He is interesting, don't you think?"

"Very," said K.

To save his life, he could not put any warmth into his voice. He would be fair. It was not in human nature to expect more of him.

"Those long talks you have, shut in your room — what in the world do you talk about? Politics?"

"Occasionally."

She was a little jealous of those evenings, when she sat alone, or when Harriet, sitting with her, made sketches under the lamp to the accompaniment of a steady hum of masculine voices from across the hall. Not that she was ignored, of course. Max came in always, before he went, and, leaning over the back of a chair, would inform her of the absolute blankness of life in the hospital without her.

"I go every day because I must," he would assure her gayly; "but, I tell you, the snap is gone out of it. When there was a chance that every cap was *your* cap, the mere progress along a corridor became thrilling." He had a foreign trick of throwing out his hands, with a little shrug of the shoulders. "*Cui bono?*" he said — which, being translated, means: "What the devil's the use!"

And K. would stand in the doorway, quietly smoking, or go back to his room and lock away in

his trunk the great German books on surgery with which he and Max had been working out a case.

So K. sat by the dining-room table and listened to her talk of Max that last evening together.

"I told Mrs. Rosenfeld to-day not to be too much discouraged about Johnny. I had seen Dr. Max do such wonderful things. Now that you are such friends," — she eyed him wistfully, — "perhaps some day you will come to one of his operations. Even if you did n't understand exactly, I know it would thrill you. And — I 'd like you to see me in my uniform, K. You never have."

She grew a little sad as the evening went on. She was going to miss K. very much. While she was ill she had watched the clock for the time to listen for him. She knew the way he slammed the front door. Palmer never slammed the door. She knew too that, just after a bang that threatened the very glass in the transom, K. would come to the foot of the stairs and call: —

"Ahoy, there!"

"Aye, aye," she would answer — which was, he assured her, the proper response.

Whether he came up the stairs at once or took his way back to Katie had depended on whether his tribute for the day was fruit or sweetbreads.

Now that was all over. They were such good friends. He would miss her, too; but he would have Harriet and Christine and — Max. Back in a circle to Max, of course.

She insisted, that last evening, on sitting up with him until midnight ushered in Christmas Day. Christine and Palmer were out; Harriet, having presented Sidney with a blouse that had been left over in the shop from the autumn's business, had yawned herself to bed.

When the bells announced midnight, Sidney roused with a start. She realized that for some time neither of them had spoken, and that K.'s eyes were fixed on her. The little clock on the shelf took up the burden of the churches, and struck the hour in quick staccato notes.

Sidney rose and went over to K., her black dress in soft folds about her.

"He is born, K."

"He is born, dear."

She stooped and kissed his cheek lightly.

Christmas Day dawned thick and white. Sidney left the little house at six, with the street light still burning through a mist of falling snow.

The hospital wards and corridors were still lighted when she went on duty at seven o'clock. She had been assigned to the men's surgical ward, and went there at once. She had not seen Carlotta Harrison since her mother's death; but she found her on duty in the surgical ward. For the second time in four months, the two girls were working side by side.

Sidney's recollection of her previous service under Carlotta made her nervous. But the older girl greeted her pleasantly.

"We were all sorry to hear of your trouble," she said. "I hope we shall get on nicely."

Sidney surveyed the ward, full to overflowing. At the far end two cots had been placed.

"The ward is heavy, is n't it?"

"Very. I've been almost mad at dressing hour. There are three of us — you, myself, and a probationer."

The first light of the Christmas morning was coming through the windows. Carlotta put out the lights and turned in a business-like way to her records.

"The probationer's name is Wardwell," she said. "Perhaps you 'd better help her with the breakfasts. If there's any way to make a mistake, she makes it."

It was after eight when Sidney found Johnny Rosenfeld.

"You here in the ward, Johnny!" she said.

Suffering had refined the boy's features. His dark, heavily fringed eyes looked at her from a pale face. But he smiled up at her cheerfully.

"I was in a private room; but it cost thirty plunks a week, so I moved. Why pay rent?"

Sidney had not seen him since his accident. She had wished to go, but K. had urged against it. She was not strong, and she had already suffered much. And now the work of the ward pressed hard. She had only a moment. She stood beside him and stroked his hand.

"I'm sorry, Johnny."

He pretended to think that her sympathy was for his fall from the estate of a private patient to the free ward.

"Oh, I'm all right, Miss Sidney," he said. "Mr Howe is paying six dollars a week for me. The difference between me and the other fellows around here is that I get a napkin on my tray and they don't."

Before his determined cheerfulness Sidney choked.

"Six dollars a week for a napkin is going some. I wish you'd tell Mr. Howe to give ma the six dollars. She'll be needing it. I'm no bloated aristocrat; I don't have to have a napkin."

"Have they told you what the trouble is?"

"Back's broke. But don't let that worry you. Dr. Max Wilson is going to operate on me. I'll be doing the tango yet."

Sidney's eyes shone. Of course, Max could do it. What a thing it was to be able to take this life-in-death of Johnny Rosenfeld's and make it life again!

All sorts of men made up Sidney's world: the derelicts who wandered through the ward in flapping slippers, listlessly carrying trays; the unshaven men in the beds, looking forward to another day of boredom, if not of pain; Palmer Howe with his broken arm; K., tender and strong, but filling no especial place in the world. Towering over them all was the younger Wilson. He meant for her, that Christmas morning, all that the other men were not — to their weakness strength, courage, daring, power.

Johnny Rosenfeld lay back on the pillows and watched her face.

"When I was a kid," he said, "and ran along the Street, calling Dr. Max a dude, I never thought I'd lie here watching that door to see him come in. You have had trouble, too. Ain't it the hell of a world, anyhow? It ain't much of a Christmas to you, either."

Sidney fed him his morning beef tea, and, because her eyes filled up with tears now and then at his helplessness, she was not so skillful as she might have been. When one spoonful had gone down his neck, he smiled up at her whimsically.

"Run for your life. The dam's burst!" he said.

As much as was possible, the hospital rested on that Christmas Day. The internes went about in fresh white ducks with sprays of mistletoe in their buttonholes, doing few dressings. Over the upper floors, where the kitchens were located, spread toward noon the insidious odor of roasting turkeys. Every ward had its vase of holly. In the afternoon, services were held in the chapel downstairs.

Wheel-chairs made their slow progress along corridors and down elevators. Convalescents who were able to walk flapped along in carpet slippers.

Gradually the chapel filled up. Outside the wide doors of the corridor the wheel-chairs were arranged in a semicircle. Behind them, dressed for the occasion, were the elevator-men, the orderlies, and Big John, who drove the ambulance.

On one side of the aisle, near the front, sat the nurses in rows, in crisp caps and fresh uniforms. On the other side had been reserved a place for the staff. The internes stood back against the wall, ready to run out between rejoicings, as it were — for a cigarette or an ambulance call, as the case might be.

Over everything brooded the after-dinner peace of Christmas afternoon.

The nurses sang, and Sidney sang with them, her fresh young voice rising above the rest. Yellow winter sunlight came through the stained-glass windows and shone on her lovely flushed face, her smooth kerchief, her cap, always just a little awry.

Dr. Max, lounging against the wall, across the chapel, found his eyes straying toward her constantly. How she stood out from the others! What a zest for living and for happiness she had!

The Episcopal clergyman read the Epistle: —

"Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

That was Sidney. She was good, and she had been anointed with the oil of gladness. And he —

His brother was singing. His deep bass voice, not always true, boomed out above the sound of the small organ. Ed had been a good brother to him; he had been a good son.

Max's vagrant mind wandered away from the service to the picture of his mother over his brother's littered desk, to the Street, to K., to the girl who had

refused to marry him because she did not trust him, to Carlotta last of all. He turned a little and ran his eyes along the line of nurses.

Ah, there she was. As if she were conscious of his scrutiny, she lifted her head and glanced toward him. Swift color flooded her face.

The nurses sang: —

"O holy Child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us to-day."

The wheel-chairs and convalescents quavered the familiar words. Dr. Ed's heavy throat shook with earnestness.

The Head, sitting a little apart with her hands folded in her lap and weary with the suffering of the world, closed her eyes and listened.

The Christmas morning had brought Sidney half a dozen gifts. K. sent her a silver thermometer case with her monogram, Christine a toilet mirror. But the gift of gifts, over which Sidney's eyes had glowed, was a great box of roses marked in Dr. Max's copper-plate writing, "From a neighbor."

Tucked in the soft folds of her kerchief was one of the roses that afternoon.

Services over, the nurses filed out. Max was waiting for Sidney in the corridor.

"Merry Christmas!" he said. and held out his hand.

"Merry Christmas!" she said. "You see!"—she glanced down to the rose she wore. "The others make the most splendid bit of color in the ward."

"But they were for you!"

"They are not any the less mine because I am letting other people have a chance to enjoy them."

Under all his gayety he was curiously diffident with her. All the pretty speeches he would have made to Carlotta under the circumstances died before her frank glance.

There were many things he wanted to say to her. He wanted to tell her that he was sorry her mother had died; that the Street was empty without her; that he looked forward to these daily meetings with her as a holy man to his hour before his saint. What he really said was to inquire politely whether she had had her Christmas dinner.

Sidney eyed him, half amused, half hurt.

"What have I done, Max? Is it bad for discipline for us to be good friends?"

"Damn discipline!" said the pride of the staff.

Carlotta was watching them from the chapel. Something in her eyes roused the devil of mischief that always slumbered in him.

"My car's been stalled in a snowdrift downtown since early this morning, and I have Ed's Peggy in a sleigh. Put on your things and come for a ride."

He hoped Carlotta could hear what he said; to be certain of it, he maliciously raised his voice a trifle.

"Just a little run," he urged. "Put on your warmest things."

Sidney protested. She was to be free that afternoon until six o'clock; but she had promised to go home.

"K. is alone."

"K. can sit with Christine. Ten to one, he's with her now."

The temptation was very strong. She had been working hard all day. The heavy odor of the hospital, mingled with the scent of pine and evergreen in the chapel, made her dizzy. The fresh outdoors called her. And, besides, if K. were with Christine —

"It's forbidden, is n't it?"

"I believe it is." He smiled at her.

"And yet, you continue to tempt me and expect me to yield!"

"One of the most delightful things about temptation is yielding now and then."

After all, the situation seemed absurd. Here was her old friend and neighbor asking to take her out for a daylight ride. The swift rebellion of youth against authority surged up in Sidney.

"Very well; I'll go."

Carlotta had gone by that time — gone with hate in her heart and black despair. She knew very well what the issue would be. Sidney would drive with him, and he would tell her how lovely she looked with the air on her face and the snow about her. The jerky motion of the little sleigh would throw them

close together. How well she knew it all! He would touch Sidney's hand daringly and smile in her eyes. That was his method: to play at love-making like an audacious boy, until quite suddenly the cloak dropped and the danger was there.

The Christmas excitement had not died out in the ward when Carlotta went back to it. On each bedside table was an orange, and beside it a pair of woolen gloves and a folded white handkerchief. There were sprays of holly scattered about, too, and the after-dinner content of roast turkey and ice-cream.

The lame girl who played the violin limped down the corridor into the ward. She was greeted with silence, that truest tribute, and with the instant composing of the restless ward to peace.

She was pretty in a young, pathetic way, and because to her Christmas was a festival and meant hope and the promise of the young Lord, she played cheerful things.

The ward sat up, remembered that it was not the Sabbath, smiled across from bed to bed.

The probationer, whose name was Wardwell, was a tall, lean girl with a long, pointed nose. She kept up a running accompaniment of small talk to the music.

"Last Christmas," she said plaintively, "we went out into the country in a hay-wagon and had a real time. I don't know what I am here for, anyhow. I am a fool."

"Undoubtedly," said Carlotta.

"Turkey and goose, mince pie and pumpkin pie, four kinds of cake; that's the sort of spread we have up in our part of the world. When I think of what I sat down to to-day —!"

She had a profound respect for Carlotta, and her motto in the hospital differed from Sidney's in that it was to placate her superiors, while Sidney's had been to care for her patients.

Seeing Carlotta bored, she ventured a little gossip. She had idly glued the label of a medicine bottle on the back of her hand, and was scratching a skull and cross-bones on it.

"I wonder if you have noticed something," she said, eyes on the label.

"I have noticed that the three-o'clock medicines are not given," said Carlotta sharply; and Miss Wardwell, still labeled and adorned, made the rounds of the ward.

When she came back she was sulky.

"I'm no gossip," she said, putting the tray on the table. "If you won't see, you won't. That Rosenfeld boy is crying."

As it was not required that tears be recorded on the record, Carlotta paid no attention to this.

"What won't I see?"

It required a little urging now. Miss Wardwell swelled with importance and let her superior ask her twice. Then: —

"Dr. Wilson's crazy about Miss Page."

A hand seemed to catch Carlotta's heart and hold it.

"They're old friends."

"Piffle! Being an old friend does n't make you look at a girl as if you wanted to take a bite out of her. Mark my word, Miss Harrison, she'll never finish her training; she'll marry him. I wish," concluded the probationer plaintively, "that some good-looking fellow like that would take a fancy to me. I'd do him credit. I am as ugly as a mud fence, but I've got style."

She was right, probably. She was long and sinuous, but she wore her lanky, ill-fitting clothes with a certain distinction. Harriet Kennedy would have dressed her in jade green to match her eyes, and with long jade earrings, and made her a fashion.

Carlotta's lips were dry. The violinist had seen the tears on Johnny Rosenfeld's white cheeks, and had rushed into rollicking, joyous music. The ward echoed with it. "I'm twenty-one and she's eighteen," hummed the ward under its breath. Miss Wardwell's thin body swayed.

"Lord, how I'd like to dance! If I ever get out of this charnel-house!"

The medicine-tray lay at Carlotta's elbow; beside it the box of labels. This crude girl was right — right. Carlotta knew it down to the depths of her tortured brain. As inevitably as the night followed the day, she was losing her game. She had lost already, unless —

If she could get Sidney out of the hospital, it would simplify things. She surmised shrewdly that on the Street their interests were wide apart. It was here that they met on common ground.

The lame violin-player limped out of the ward; the shadows of the early winter twilight settled down. At five o'clock Carlotta sent Miss Wardwell to first supper, to the surprise of that seldom surprised person. The ward lay still or shuffled about quietly. Christmas was over, and there were no evening papers to look forward to.

Carlotta gave the five-o'clock medicines. Then she sat down at the table near the door, with the tray in front of her. There are certain thoughts that are at first functions of the brain; after a long time the spinal cord takes them up and converts them into acts almost automatically. Perhaps because for the last month she had done the thing so often in her mind, its actual performance was almost without conscious thought.

Carlotta took a bottle from her medicine cupboard, and, writing a new label for it, pasted it over the old one. Then she exchanged it for one of the same size on the medicine tray.

In the dining-room, at the probationers' table, Miss Wardwell was talking.

"Believe me," she said, "me for the country and the simple life after this. They think I'm only a probationer and don't see anything, but I've got eyes in my head. Harrison is stark crazy over Dr.

Wilson, and she thinks I don't see it. But never mind; I paid her up to-day for a few of the jolts she has given me."

Throughout the dining-room busy and competent young women came and ate, hastily or leisurely as their opportunity was, and went on their way again. In their hands they held the keys, not always of life and death perhaps, but of ease from pain, of tenderness, of smooth pillows, and cups of water to thirsty lips. In their eyes, as in Sidney's, burned the light of service.

But here and there one found women, like Carlotta and Miss Wardwell, who had mistaken their vocation, who railed against the monotony of the life, its limitations, its endless sacrifices. They showed it in their eyes.

Fifty or so against two — fifty who looked out on the world with the fearless glance of those who have seen life to its depths, and, with the broad understanding of actual contact, still found it good. Fifty who were learning or had learned not to draw aside their clean starched skirts from the drab of the streets. And the fifty, who found the very scum of the gutters not too filthy for tenderness and care, let Carlotta and, in lesser measure, the new probationer alone. They could not have voiced their reasons.

The supper-room was filled with their soft voices, the rustle of their skirts, the gleam of their stiff white caps.

When Carlotta came in, she greeted none of them. They did not like her, and she knew it.

Before her, instead of the tidy supper-table, she was seeing the medicine-tray as she had left it.

"I guess I've fixed her," she said to herself.

Her very soul was sick with fear of what she had done.

CHAPTER XVIII

K. saw Sidney for only a moment on Christmas Day. This was when the gay little sleigh had stopped in front of the house.

Sidney had hurried radiantly in for a moment. Christine's parlor was gay with firelight and noisy with chatter and with the clatter of her tea-cups.

K., lounging indolently in front of the fire, had turned to see Sidney in the doorway, and leaped to his feet.

"I can't come in," she cried. "I am only here for a moment. I am out sleigh-riding with Dr. Wilson. It's perfectly delightful."

"Ask him in for a cup of tea," Christine called out. "Here's Aunt Harriet and mother and even Palmer!"

Christine had aged during the last weeks, but she was putting up a brave front.

"I'll ask him."

Sidney ran to the front door and called: "Will you come in for a cup of tea?"

"Tea! Good Heavens, no. Hurry."

As Sidney turned back into the house, she met Palmer. He had come out in the hall, and had closed the door into the parlor behind him. His arm was still in splints, and swung suspended in a gay silk sling.

The sound of laughter came through the door faintly.

"How is he to-day?" He meant Johnny, of course. The boy's face was always with him.

"Better in some ways, but of course —"

"When are they going to operate?"

"When he is a little stronger. Why don't you come in to see him?"

"I can't. That's the truth. I can't face the poor youngster."

"He does n't seem to blame you; he says it's all in the game."

"Sidney, does Christine know that I was not alone that night?"

"If she guesses, it is not because of anything the boy has said. He has told nothing."

Out of the firelight, away from the chatter and the laughter, Palmer's face showed worn and haggard. He put his free hand on Sidney's shoulder.

"I was thinking that perhaps if I went away —"

"That would be cowardly, would n't it?"

"If Christine would only say something and get it over with! She does n't sulk; I think she's really trying to be kind. But she hates me, Sidney. She turns pale every time I touch her hand."

All the light had died out of Sidney's face. Life was terrible, after all — overwhelming. One did wrong things, and other people suffered; or one was good, as her mother had been, and was left lonely, a widow, or like Aunt Harriet. Life was a sham,

too. Things were so different from what they seemed to be: Christine beyond the door, pouring tea and laughing, with her heart in ashes; Palmer beside her, faultlessly dressed and wretched. The only one she thought really contented was K. He seemed to move so calmly in his little orbit. He was always so steady, so balanced. If life held no heights for him, at least it held no depths.

So Sidney thought, in her ignorance!

"There's only one thing, Palmer," she said gravely. "Johnny Rosenfeld is going to have his chance. If anybody in the world can save him, Max Wilson can."

The light of that speech was in her eyes when she went out to the sleigh again. K. followed her out and tucked the robes in carefully about her.

"Warm enough?"

"All right, thank you."

"Don't go too far. Is there any chance of having you home for supper?"

"I think not. I am to go on duty at six again."

If there was a shadow in K.'s eyes, she did not see it. He waved them off smilingly from the pavement, and went rather heavily back into the house.

"Just how many men are in love with you, Sidney?" asked Max, as Peggy started up the Street.

"No one that I know of, unless —"

"Exactly. Unless —"

"What I meant," she said with dignity, "is that

unless one counts very young men, and that is n't really love."

"We'll leave out Joe Drummond and myself — for, of course, I am very young. Who is in love with you besides Le Moyne? Any of the internes at the hospital?"

"Me! Le Moyne is not in love with me."

There was such sincerity in her voice that Wilson was relieved.

K., older than himself and more grave, had always had an odd attraction for women. He had been frankly bored by them, but the fact had remained. And Max more than suspected that now, at last, he had been caught.

"Don't you really mean that you are in love with Le Moyne?"

"Please don't be absurd. I am not in love with anybody; I have n't time to be in love. I have my profession now."

"Bah! A woman's real profession is love."

Sidney differed from this hotly. So warm did the argument become that they passed without seeing a middle-aged gentleman, short and rather heavy set, struggling through a snowdrift on foot, and carrying in his hand a dilapidated leather bag.

Dr. Ed hailed them. But the cutter slipped by and left him knee-deep, looking ruefully after them.

"The young scamp!" he said. "So that's where Peggy is!"

Nevertheless, there was no anger in Dr. Ed's mind, only a vague and inarticulate regret. These things that came so easily to Max, the affection of women, gay little irresponsibilities like the stealing of Peggy and the sleigh, had never been his. If there was any faint resentment, it was at himself. He had raised the boy wrong — he had taught him to be selfish. Holding the bag high out of the drifts, he made his slow progress up the Street.

At something after two o'clock that night, K. put down his pipe and listened. He had not been able to sleep since midnight. In his dressing-gown he had sat by the small fire, thinking. The content of his first few months on the Street was rapidly giving way to unrest. He who had meant to cut himself off from life found himself again in close touch with it; his eddy was deep with it.

For the first time, he had begun to question the wisdom of what he had done. Had it been cowardice, after all? It had taken courage, God knew, to give up everything and come away. In a way, it would have taken more courage to have stayed. Had he been right or wrong?

And there was a new element. He had thought, at first, that he could fight down this love for Sidney. But it was increasingly hard. The innocent touch of her hand on his arm, the moment when he had held her in his arms after her mother's death, the thousand small contacts of her returns to the little

house — all these set his blood on fire. And it was fighting blood.

Under his quiet exterior K. fought many conflicts those winter days — over his desk and ledger at the office, in his room alone, with Harriet planning fresh triumphs beyond the partition, even by Christine's fire, with Christine just across, sitting in silence and watching his grave profile and steady eyes.

He had a little picture of Sidney — a snap-shot that he had taken himself. It showed Sidney minus a hand, which had been out of range when the camera had been snapped, and standing on a steep declivity which would have been quite a level had he held the camera straight. Nevertheless it was Sidney, her hair blowing about her, eyes looking out, tender lips smiling. When she was not at home, it sat on K.'s dresser, propped against his collar-box. When she was in the house, it lay under the pin-cushion.

Two o'clock in the morning, then, and K. in his dressing-gown, with the picture propped, not against the collar-box, but against his lamp, where he could see it.

He sat forward in his chair, his hands folded around his knee, and looked at it. He was trying to picture the Sidney of the photograph in his old life — trying to find a place for her. But it was difficult. There had been few women in his old life. His mother had died many years before. There had been women who had cared for him, but he put them impatiently out of his mind.

Then the bell rang.

Christine was moving about below. He could hear her quick steps. Almost before he had heaved his long legs out of the chair, she was tapping at his door outside.

"It's Mrs. Rosenfeld. She says she wants to see you."

He went down the stairs. Mrs. Rosenfeld was standing in the lower hall, a shawl about her shoulders. Her face was white and drawn above it.

"I've had word to go to the hospital," she said "I thought maybe you'd go with me. It seems as if I can't stand it alone. Oh, Johnny, Johnny!"

"Where's Palmer?" K. demanded of Christine.

"He's not in yet."

"Are you afraid to stay in the house alone?"

"No; please go."

He ran up the staircase to his room and flung on some clothing. In the lower hall, Mrs. Rosenfeld's sobs had become low moans. Christine stood helplessly over her.

"I am terribly sorry," she said — "terribly sorry! When I think whose fault all this is!"

Mrs. Rosenfeld put out a work-hardened hand and caught Christine's fingers.

"Never mind that," she said. "You did n't do it. I guess you and I understand each other. Only pray God you never have a child."

K. never forgot the scene in the small emergency

ward to which Johnny had been taken. Under the white lights his boyish figure looked strangely long. There was a group around the bed — Max Wilson, two or three internes, the night nurse on duty, and the Head.

Sitting just inside the door on a straight chair was Sidney — such a Sidney as he never had seen before, her face colorless, her eyes wide and unseeing, her hands clenched in her lap. When he stood beside her, she did not move or look up. The group around the bed had parted to admit Mrs. Rosenfeld, and closed again. Only Sidney and K. remained by the door, isolated, alone.

"You must not take it like that, dear. It's sad, of course. But, after all, in that condition —"

It was her first knowledge that he was there. But she did not turn.

"They say I poisoned him." Her voice was dreary, inflectionless.

"You — what?"

"They say I gave him the wrong medicine; that he's dying; that I murdered him." She shivered.

K. touched her hands. They were ice-cold.

"Tell me about it."

"There is nothing to tell. I came on duty at six o'clock and gave the medicines. When the night nurse came on at seven, everything was all right. The medicine-tray was just as it should be. Johnny was asleep. I went to say good-night to him and he — he was asleep. I did n't give him anything but

what was on the tray," she finished piteously. "I looked at the label; I always look."

By a shifting of the group around the bed, K.'s eyes looked for a moment directly into Carlotta's. Just for a moment; then the crowd closed up again. It was well for Carlotta that it did. She looked as if she had seen a ghost — closed her eyes, even reeled.

"Miss Harrison is worn out," Dr. Wilson said brusquely. "Get some one to take her place."

But Carlotta rallied. After all, the presence of this man in this room at such a time meant nothing. He was Sidney's friend, that was all.

But her nerve was shaken. The thing had gone beyond her. She had not meant to kill. It was the boy's weakened condition that was turning her revenge into tragedy.

"I am all right," she pleaded across the bed to the Head. "Let me stay, please. He's from my ward. I — I am responsible."

Wilson was at his wits' end. He had done everything he knew without result. The boy, rousing for an instant, would lapse again into stupor. With a healthy man they could have tried more vigorous measures — could have forced him to his feet and walked him about, could have beaten him with knotted towels dipped in ice-water. But the wrecked body on the bed could stand no such heroic treatment.

It was Le Moyne, after all, who saved Johnny Rosenfeld's life. For, when staff and nurses had ex-

hausted all their resources, he stepped forward with a quiet word that brought the internes to their feet astonished.

There was a new treatment for such cases — it had been tried abroad. He looked at Max.

Max had never heard of it. He threw out his hands.

"Try it, for Heaven's sake," he said. "I'm all in."

The apparatus was not in the house — must be extemporized, indeed, at last, of odds and ends from the operating-room. K. did the work, his long fingers deft and skillful — while Mrs. Rosenfeld knelt by the bed with her face buried; while Sidney sat, dazed and bewildered, on her little chair inside the door; while night nurses tiptoed along the corridor, and the night watchman stared incredulous from outside the door.

When the two great rectangles that were the emergency ward windows had turned from mirrors reflecting the room to gray rectangles in the morning light, Johnny Rosenfeld opened his eyes and spoke the first words that marked his return from the dark valley.

"Gee, this is the life!" he said, and smiled into K.'s watchful face.

When it was clear that the boy would live, K. rose stiffly from the bedside and went over to Sidney's chair.

"He's all right now," he said — "as all right as he can be, poor lad!"

"You did it — you! How strange that you should know such a thing. How am I to thank you?"

The internes, talking among themselves, had wandered down to their dining-room for early coffee. Wilson was giving a few last instructions as to the boy's care. Quite unexpectedly, Sidney caught K.'s hand and held it to her lips. The iron repression of the night, of months indeed, fell away before her simple caress.

"My dear, my dear," he said huskily. "Anything that I can do — for you — at any time —"

It was after Sidney had crept like a broken thing to her room that Carlotta Harrison and K. came face to face. Johnny was quite conscious by that time, a little blue around the lips, but valiantly cheerful.

"More things can happen to a fellow than I ever knew there was!" he said to his mother, and submitted rather sheepishly to her tears and caresses.

"You were always a good boy, Johnny," she said. "Just you get well enough to come home. I'll take care of you the rest of my life. We will get you a wheel-chair when you can be about, and I can take you out in the park when I come from work."

"I'll be passenger and you'll be chauffeur, ma."

"Mr. Le Moyne is going to get your father sent up again. With sixty-five cents a day and what I make, we'll get along."

"You bet we will!"

"Oh, Johnny, if I could see you coming in the

door again and yelling 'mother' and 'supper' in one breath!"

The meeting between Carlotta and Le Moyne was very quiet. She had been making a sort of subconscious impression on the retina of his mind during all the night. It would be difficult to tell when he actually knew her.

When the preparations for moving Johnny back to the big ward had been made, the other nurses left the room, and Carlotta and the boy were together. K. stopped her on her way to the door.

"Miss Harrison!"

"Yes, Dr. Edwardes."

"I am not Dr. Edwardes here; my name is Le Moyne."

"Ah!"

"I have not seen you since you left St. John's."

"No; I — I rested for a few months."

"I suppose they do not know that you were — that you have had any previous hospital experience."

"No. Are you going to tell them?"

"I shall not tell them, of course."

And thus, by simple mutual consent, it was arranged that each should respect the other's confidence.

Carlotta staggered to her room. There had been a time, just before dawn, when she had had one of those swift revelations that sometimes come at the end of a long night. She had seen herself as she was.

The boy was very low, hardly breathing. Her past stretched behind her, a series of small revenges and passionate outbursts, swift yieldings, slow remorse. She dared not look ahead. She would have given every hope she had in the world, just then, for Sidney's stainless past.

She hated herself with that deadliest loathing that comes of complete self-revelation.

And she carried to her room the knowledge that the night's struggle had been in vain — that, although Johnny Rosenfeld would live, she had gained nothing by what he had suffered. The whole night had shown her the hopelessness of any stratagem to win Wilson from his new allegiance. She had surprised him in the hallway, watching Sidney's slender figure as she made her way up the stairs to her room. Never, in all his past overtures to her, had she seen that look in his eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

To Harriet Kennedy, Sidney's sentence of thirty days' suspension came as a blow. K. broke the news to her that evening before the time for Sidney's arrival.

The little household was sharing in Harriet's prosperity. Katie had a helper now, a little Austrian girl named Mimi. And Harriet had established on the Street the innovation of after-dinner coffee. It was over the after-dinner coffee that K. made his announcement.

"What do you mean by saying she is coming home for thirty days? Is the child ill?"

"Not ill, although she is not quite well. The fact is, Harriet," — for it was "Harriet" and "K." by this time, — "there has been a sort of semi-accident up at the hospital. It has n't resulted seriously, but — "

Harriet put down the apostle-spoon in her hand and stared across at him.

"Then she has been suspended? What did she do? I don't believe she did anything!"

"There was a mistake about the medicine, and she was blamed; that's all."

"She'd better come home and stay home," said Harriet shortly. "I hope it does n't get in the papers. This dressmaking business is a funny sort

of thing. One word against you or any of your family, and the crowd's off somewhere else."

"There's nothing against Sidney," K. reminded her. "Nothing in the world. I saw the superintendent myself this afternoon. It seems it's a mere matter of discipline. Somebody made a mistake, and they cannot let such a thing go by. But he believes, as I do, that it was not Sidney."

However Harriet had hardened herself against the girl's arrival, all she had meant to say fled when she saw Sidney's circled eyes and pathetic mouth.

"You child!" she said. "You poor little girl!" And took her to her corseted bosom.

For the time at least, Sidney's world had gone to pieces about her. All her brave vaunt of service faded before her disgrace.

When Christine would have seen her, she kept her door locked and asked for just that one evening alone. But after Harriet had retired, and Mimi, the Austrian, had crept out to the corner to mail a letter back to Gratz, Sidney unbolted her door and listened in the little upper hall. Harriet, her head in a towel, her face carefully cold-creamed, had gone to bed; but K.'s light, as usual, was shining over the transom. Sidney tiptoed to the door.

"K.!"

Almost immediately he opened the door.

"May I come in and talk to you?"

He turned and took a quick survey of the room.

The picture was against the collar-box. But he took the risk and held the door wide.

Sidney came in and sat down by the fire. By being adroit he managed to slip the little picture over and under the box before she saw it. It is doubtful if she would have realized its significance, had she seen it.

"I've been thinking things over," she said. "It seems to me I'd better not go back."

He had left the door carefully open. Men are always more conventional than women.

"That would be foolish, would n't it, when you have done so well? And, besides, since you are not guilty, Sidney —"

"I did n't do it!" she cried passionately. "I know I did n't. But I've lost faith in myself. I can't keep on; that's all there is to it. All last night, in the emergency ward, I felt it going. I clutched at it. I kept saying to myself: 'You did n't do it, you did n't do it'; and all the time something inside of me was saying, 'Not now, perhaps; but sometime you may.'"

Poor K., who had reasoned all this out for himself and had come to the same *impasse!*

"To go on like this, feeling that one has life and death in one's hand, and then perhaps some day to make a mistake like that!" She looked up at him forlornly. "I am just not brave enough, K."

"Would n't it be braver to keep on? Are n't you giving up very easily?"

Her world was in pieces about her, and she felt

alone in a wide and empty place. And, because her nerves were drawn taut until they were ready to snap, Sidney turned on him shrewishly.

"I think you are all afraid I will come back to stay. Nobody really wants me anywhere — in all the world! Not at the hospital, not here, not any place. I am no use."

"When you say that nobody wants you," said K., not very steadily, "I — I think you are making a mistake."

"Who?" she demanded. "Christine? Aunt Harriet? Katie? The only person who ever really wanted me was my mother, and I went away and left her!"

She scanned his face closely, and, reading there something she did not understand, she colored suddenly.

"I believe you mean Joe Drummond."

"No; I do not mean Joe Drummond."

If he had found any encouragement in her face, he would have gone on recklessly; but her blank eyes warned him.

"If you mean Max Wilson," said Sidney, "you are entirely wrong. He's not in love with me — not, that is, any more than he is in love with a dozen girls. He likes to be with me — oh, I know that; but that does n't mean — anything else. Anyhow, after this disgrace —"

"There is no disgrace, child."

"He'll think me careless, at the least. And his ideals are so high, K."

"You say he likes to be with you. What about you?"

Sidney had been sitting in a low chair by the fire. She rose with a sudden passionate movement. In the informality of the household, she had visited K. in her dressing-gown and slippers; and now she stood before him, a tragic young figure, clutching the folds of her gown across her breast.

"I worship him, K.," she said tragically. "When I see him coming, I want to get down and let him walk on me. I know his step in the hall. I know the very way he rings for the elevator. When I see him in the operating-room, cool and calm while every one else is flustered and excited, he — he looks like a god."

Then, half ashamed of her outburst, she turned her back to him and stood gazing at the small coal fire. It was as well for K. that she did not see his face. For that one moment the despair that was in him shone in his eyes. He glanced around the shabby little room, at the sagging bed, the collar-box, the pin-cushion, the old marble-topped bureau under which Reginald had formerly made his nest, at his untidy table, littered with pipes and books, at the image in the mirror of his own tall figure, stooped and weary.

"It's real, all this?" he asked after a pause. "You're sure it's not just — glamour, Sidney?"

"It's real — terribly real." Her voice was muffled, and he knew then that she was crying.

She was mightily ashamed of it. Tears, of course,

except in the privacy of one's closet, were not ethical on the Street.

"Perhaps he cares very much, too."

"Give me a handkerchief," said Sidney in a muffled tone, and the little scene was broken into while K. searched through a bureau drawer. Then:

"It's all over, anyhow, since this. If he'd really cared he'd have come over to-night. When one is in trouble one needs friends."

Back in a circle she came inevitably to her suspension. She would never go back, she said passionately. She was innocent, had been falsely accused. If they could think such a thing about her, she didn't want to be in their old hospital.

K. questioned her, alternately soothing and probing.

"You are positive about it?"

"Absolutely. I have given him his medicines dozens of times."

"You looked at the label?"

"I swear I did, K."

"Who else had access to the medicine closet?"

"Carlotta Harrison carried the keys, of course. I was off duty from four to six. When Carlotta left the ward, the probationer would have them."

"Have you reason to think that either one of these girls would wish you harm?"

"None whatever," began Sidney vehemently; and then, checking herself, — "unless — but that's rather ridiculous."

"What is ridiculous?"

"I've sometimes thought that Carlotta — but I am sure she is perfectly fair with me. Even if she — if she —"

"Yes?"

"Even if she likes Dr. Wilson, I don't believe — Why, K., she would n't! It would be murder."

"Murder, of course," said K., "in intention, anyhow. Of course she did n't do it. I'm only trying to find out whose mistake it was."

Soon after that she said good-night and went out. She turned in the doorway and smiled tremulously back at him.

"You have done me a lot of good. You almost make me believe in myself."

"That's because I believe in you."

With a quick movement that was one of her charms, Sidney suddenly closed the door and slipped back into the room. K., hearing the door close, thought she had gone, and dropped heavily into a chair.

"My best friend in all the world!" said Sidney suddenly from behind him, and, bending over, she kissed him on the cheek.

The next instant the door had closed behind her, and K. was left alone to such wretchedness and bliss as the evening had brought him.

On toward morning, Harriet, who slept but restlessly in her towel, wakened to the glare of his light over the transom.

"K.!" she called pettishly from her door. "I wish you would n't go to sleep and let your light burn!"

K., surmising the towel and cold cream, had the tact not to open his door.

"I am not asleep, Harriet, and I am sorry about the light. It's going out now."

Before he extinguished the light, he walked over to the old dresser and surveyed himself in the glass. Two nights without sleep and much anxiety had told on him. He looked old, haggard, infinitely tired. Mentally he compared himself with Wilson, flushed with success, erect, triumphant, almost insolent. Nothing had more certainly told him the hopelessness of his love for Sidney than her good-night kiss. He was her brother, her friend. He would never be her lover. He drew a long breath and proceeded to undress in the dark.

Joe Drummond came to see Sidney the next day. She would have avoided him if she could, but Mimi had ushered him up to the sewing-room boudoir before she had time to escape. She had not seen the boy for two months, and the change in him startled her. He was thinner, rather hectic, scrupulously well dressed.

"Why, Joe!" she said, and then: "Won't you sit down?"

He was still rather theatrical. He dramatized himself, as he had that night the June before when he had asked Sidney to marry him. He stood just inside the doorway. He offered no conventional

greeting whatever; but, after surveying her briefly, her black gown, the lines around her eyes: —

"You're not going back to that place, of course?"

"I — I have n't decided."

"Then somebody's got to decide for you. The thing for you to do is to stay right here, Sidney. People know you on the Street. Nobody here would ever accuse you of trying to murder anybody."

In spite of herself, Sidney smiled a little.

"Nobody thinks I tried to murder him. It was a mistake about the medicines. I did n't do it, Joe."

His love was purely selfish, for he brushed aside her protest as if she had not spoken.

"You give me the word and I'll go and get your things; I've got a car of my own now."

"But, Joe, they have only done what they thought was right. Whoever made it, there was a mistake."

He stared at her incredulously.

"You don't mean that you are going to stand for this sort of thing? Every time some fool makes a mistake, are they going to blame it on you?"

"Please don't be theatrical. Come in and sit down. I can't talk to you if you explode like a rocket all the time."

Her matter-of-fact tone had its effect. He advanced into the room, but he still scorned a chair.

"I guess you've been wondering why you have n't heard from me," he said. "I've seen you more than you've seen me."

Sidney looked uneasy. The idea of espionage is

always repugnant, and to have a rejected lover always in the offing, as it were, was disconcerting.

"I wish you would be just a little bit sensible, Joe. It's so silly of you, really. It's not because you care for me; it's really because you care for yourself."

"You can't look at me and say that, Sid."

He ran his finger around his collar — an old gesture; but the collar was very loose. He was thin; his neck showed it.

"I'm just eating my heart out for you, and that's the truth. And it isn't only that. Everywhere I go, people say, 'There's the fellow Sidney Page turned down when she went into the hospital.' I've got so I keep off the Street as much as I can."

Sidney was half alarmed, half irritated. This wild, excited boy was not the doggedly faithful youth she had always known. It seemed to her that he was hardly sane — that underneath his quiet manner and carefully repressed voice there lurked something irrational, something she could not cope with. She looked up at him helplessly.

"But what do you want me to do? You — you almost frighten me. If you'd only sit down —"

"I want you to come home. I 'm not asking anything else now. I just want you to come back, so that things will be the way they used to be. Now that they have turned you out —"

"They've done nothing of the sort. I've told you that."

"You're going back?"

"Absolutely."

"Because you love the hospital, or because you love somebody connected with the hospital?"

Sidney was thoroughly angry by this time, angry and reckless. She had come through so much that every nerve was crying in passionate protest.

"If it will make you understand things any better," she cried, "I am going back for both reasons!"

She was sorry the next moment. But her words seemed, surprisingly enough, to steady him. For the first time, he sat down.

"Then, as far as I am concerned, it's all over, is it?"

"Yes, Joe. I told you that long ago."

He seemed hardly to be listening. His thoughts had ranged far ahead. Suddenly: —

"You think Christine has her hands full with Palmer, don't you? Well, if you take Max Wilson, you're going to have more trouble than Christine ever dreamed of. I can tell you some things about him now that will make you think twice."

But Sidney had reached her limit. She went over and flung open the door.

"Every word that you say shows me how right I am in not marrying you, Joe," she said. "Real men do not say those things about each other under any circumstances. You're behaving like a bad boy. I don't want you to come back until you have grown up."

He was very white, but he picked up his hat and went to the door.

"I guess I *am* crazy," he said. "I've been wanting to go away, but mother raises such a fuss — I'll not annoy you any more."

He reached in his pocket and, pulling out a smal box, held it toward her. The lid was punched full of holes.

"Reginald," he said solemnly. "I've had him all winter. Some boys caught him in the park, and I brought him home."

He left her standing there speechless with surprise, with the box in her hand, and ran down the stairs and out into the Street. At the foot of the steps he almost collided with Dr. Ed.

"Back to see Sidney?" said Dr. Ed genially "That's fine, Joe. I'm glad you've made it up."

The boy went blindly down the Street.

CHAPTER XX

WINTER relaxed its clutch slowly that year. March was bitterly cold; even April found the roads still frozen and the hedgerows clustered with ice. But at mid-day there was spring in the air. In the courtyard of the hospital, convalescents sat on the benches and watched for robins. The fountain, which had frozen out, was being repaired. Here and there on ward window-sills tulips opened their gaudy petals to the sun.

Harriet had gone abroad for a flying trip in March. and came back laden with new ideas, model gowns, and fresh enthusiasm. She carried out and planted flowers on her sister's grave, and went back to her work with a feeling of duty done. A combination of crocuses and snow on the ground had given her an inspiration for a gown. She drew it in pencil on an envelope on her way back in the street car.

Grace Irving, having made good during the white sales, had been sent to the spring cottons. She began to walk with her head higher. The day she sold Sidney material for a simple white gown, she was very happy. Once a customer brought her a bunch of primroses. All day she kept them under the counter in a glass of water, and at evening she took them to Johnny Rosenfeld, still lying prone in the hospital.

On Sidney, on K., and on Christine the winter had left its mark heavily. Christine, readjusting her life to new conditions, was graver, more thoughtful. She was alone most of the time now. Under K.'s guidance, she had given up the "Duchess" and was reading real books. She was thinking real thoughts, too, for the first time in her life.

Sidney, as tender as ever, had lost a little of the radiance from her eyes; her voice had deepened. Where she had been a pretty girl, she was now lovely. She was back in the hospital again, this time in the children's ward. K., going in one day to take Johnny Rosenfeld a basket of fruit, saw her there with a child in her arms, and a light in her eyes that he had never seen before. It hurt him, rather — things being as they were with him. When he came out he looked straight ahead.

With the opening of spring the little house at Hillfoot took on fresh activities. Tillie was house-cleaning with great thoroughness. She scrubbed carpets, took down the clean curtains, and put them up again freshly starched. It was as if she found in sheer activity and fatigue a remedy for her uneasiness.

Business had not been very good. The impeccable character of the little house had been against it. True, Mr. Schwitter had a little bar and served the best liquors he could buy; but he discouraged rowdiness — had been known to refuse to sell to boys under twenty-one and to men who had already overindulged. The word went about that Schwitter's was

no place for a good time. Even Tillie's chicken and waffles failed against this handicap.

By the middle of April the house-cleaning was done. One or two motor parties had come out, dined sedately and wined moderately, and had gone back to the city again. The next two weeks saw the weather clear. The roads dried up, robins filled the trees with their noisy spring songs, and still business continued dull.

By the first day of May, Tillie's uneasiness had become certainty. On that morning Mr. Schwitter, coming in from the early milking, found her sitting in the kitchen, her face buried in her apron. He put down the milk-pails and, going over to her, put a hand on her head.

"I guess there's no mistake, then?"

"There's no mistake," said poor Tillie into her apron.

He bent down and kissed the back of her neck. Then, when she failed to brighten, he tiptoed around the kitchen, poured the milk into pans, and rinsed the buckets, working methodically in his heavy way. The tea-kettle had boiled dry. He filled that, too. Then: —

"Do you want to see a doctor?"

"I'd better see somebody," she said, without looking up. "And — don't think I'm blaming you. I guess I don't really blame anybody. As far as that goes, I've wanted a child right along. It isn't the trouble I am thinking of, either."

He nodded. Words were unnecessary between them. He made some tea clumsily and browned her a piece of toast. When he had put them on one end of the kitchen table, he went over to her again.

"I guess I'd ought to have thought of this before, but all I thought of was trying to get a little happiness out of life. And," — he stroked her arm, — "as far as I am concerned, it's been worth while, Tillie. No matter what I've had to do, I've always looked forward to coming back here to you in the evening. Maybe I don't say it enough, but I guess you know feel it all right."

Without looking up, she placed her hand over his.

"I guess we started wrong," he went on. "You can't build happiness on what is n't right. You and I can manage well enough; but now that there's going to be another, it looks different, somehow."

After that morning Tillie took up her burden stoically. The hope of motherhood alternated with black fits of depression. She sang at her work, to burst out into sudden tears.

Other things were not going well. Schwitter had given up his nursery business; but the motorists who came to Hillfoot did not come back. When, at last, he took the horse and buggy and drove about the country for orders, he was too late. Other nurserymen had been before him; shrubberies and orchards were already being set out. The second payment on his mortgage would be due in July. By the middle

of May they were frankly up against it. Schwitter at last dared to put the situation into words.

"We're not making good, Til," he said. "And I guess you know the reason. We are too decent; that's what's the matter with us." There was no irony in his words.

With all her sophistication, Tillie was vastly ignorant of life. He had to explain.

"We'll have to keep a sort of hotel," he said lamely. "Sell to everybody that comes along, and — if parties want to stay over-night —"

Tillie's white face turned crimson.

"I'll do no such thing."

He attempted a compromise. "If it's bad weather, and they're married —"

"How are we to know if they are married or not?"

He admired her very much for it. He had always respected her. But the situation was not less acute. There were two or three unfurnished rooms on the second floor. He began to make tentative suggestions as to their furnishing. Once he got a catalogue from an installment house, and tried to hide it from her. Tillie's eyes blazed. She burned it in the kitchen stove.

Schwitter himself was ashamed; but the idea obsessed him. Other people fattened on the frailties of human nature. Two miles away, on the other road, was a public house that had netted the owner ten thousand dollars profit the year before. They bought their beer from the same concern. He was not

as young as he had been; there was the expense of keeping his wife — he had never allowed her to go into the charity ward at the asylum. Now that there was going to be a child, there would be three people dependent upon him. He was past fifty, and not robust.

One night, after Tillie was asleep, he slipped noiselessly into his clothes and out to the barn, where he hitched up the horse with nervous fingers.

Tillie never learned of that midnight excursion to the "Climbing Rose," two miles away. Lights blazed in every window; a dozen automobiles were parked before the barn. Somebody was playing a piano. From the bar came the jingle of glasses and loud, cheerful conversation.

When Schwitter turned the horse's head back toward Hillfoot, his mind was made up. He would furnish the upper rooms; he would bring a bar keeper from town — these people wanted mixed drinks; he could get a second-hand piano somewhere.

Tillie's rebellion was instant and complete. When she found him determined, she made the compromise that her condition necessitated. She could not leave him, but she would not stay in the rehabilitated little house. When, a week after Schwitter's visit to the "Climbing Rose," an installment van arrived from town with the new furniture, Tillie moved out to what had been the harness-room of the old barn and there established herself.

"I am not leaving you," she told him. "I don't

even know that I am blaming you. But I am not going to have anything to do with it, and that's flat."

So it happened that K., making a spring pilgrimage to see Tillie, stopped astounded in the road. The weather was warm, and he carried his Norfolk coat over his arm. The little house was bustling; a dozen automobiles were parked in the barnyard. The bar was crowded, and a barkeeper in a white coat was mixing drinks with the casual indifference of his kind. There were tables under the trees on the lawn, and a new sign on the gate.

Even Schwitter bore a new look of prosperity. Over his schooner of beer K. gathered something of the story.

"I'm not proud of it, Mr. Le Moyne. I've come to do a good many things the last year or so that I never thought I would do. But one thing leads to another. First I took Tillie away from her good position, and after that nothing went right. Then there were things coming on" — he looked at K. anxiously — "that meant more expense. I would be glad if you would n't say anything about it at Mrs. McKee's."

"I'll not speak of it, of course."

It was then, when K. asked for Tillie, that Mr. Schwitter's unhappiness became more apparent.

"She would n't stand for it," he said. "She moved out the day I furnished the rooms upstairs and got the piano."

"Do you mean she has gone?"

"As far as the barn. She would n't stay in the house. I — I'll take you out there, if you would like to see her."

K. shrewdly surmised that Tillie would prefer to see him alone, under the circumstances.

"I guess I can find her," he said, and rose from the little table.

"If you — if you can say anything to help me out, sir, I'd appreciate it. Of course, she understands how I am driven. But — especially if you would tell her that the Street does n't know —"

"I'll do all I can," K. promised, and followed the path to the barn.

Tillie received him with a certain dignity. The little harness-room was very comfortable. A white iron bed in a corner, a flat table with a mirror above it, a rocking-chair, and a sewing-machine furnished the room.

"I would n't stand for it," she said simply; "so here I am. Come in, Mr. Le Moyne."

There being but one chair, she sat on the bed. The room was littered with small garments in the making. She made no attempt to conceal them; rather, she pointed to them with pride.

"I am making them myself. I have a lot of time these days. He's got a hired girl at the house. It was hard enough to sew at first, with me making two right sleeves almost every time." Then, seeing his kindly eye on her: "Well, it's happened, Mr.

Le Moyne. What am I going to do? What am I going to be?"

"You're going to be a very good mother, Tillie."

She was manifestly in need of cheering. K., who also needed cheering that spring day, found his consolation in seeing her brighten under the small gossip of the Street. The deaf-and-dumb book agent had taken on life insurance as a side issue, and was doing well; the grocery store at the corner was going to be torn down, and over the new store there were to be apartments; Reginald had been miraculously returned, and was building a new nest under his bureau; Harriet Kennedy had been to Paris, and had brought home six French words and a new figure.

Outside the open door the big barn loomed cool and shadowy, full of empty spaces where later the hay would be stored; anxious mother hens led their broods about; underneath in the horse stable the restless horses pawed in their stalls. From where he sat, Le Moyne could see only the round breasts of the two hills, the fresh green of the orchard, the cows in a meadow beyond.

Tillie followed his eyes.

"I like it here," she confessed. "I've had more time to think since I moved out than I ever had in my life before. Them hills help. When the noise is worst down at the house, I look at the hills there and —"

There were great thoughts in her mind — that the hills meant God, and that in His good time per-

haps it would all come right. But she was inarticulate. "The hills help a lot," she repeated.

K. rose. Tillie's work-basket lay near him. He picked up one of the little garments. In his big hands it looked small, absurd.

"I — I want to tell you something, Tillie. Don't count on it too much; but Mrs. Schwitter has been failing rapidly for the last month or two."

Tillie caught his arm.

"You've seen her?"

"I was interested. I wanted to see things work out right for you."

All the color had faded from Tillie's face.

"You're very good to me, Mr. Le Moyne," she said. "I don't wish the poor soul any harm, but — oh, my God! if she's going, let it be before the next four months are over."

K. had fallen into the habit, after his long walks, of dropping into Christine's little parlor for a chat before he went upstairs. Those early spring days found Harriet Kennedy busy late in the evenings, and, save for Christine and K., the house was practically deserted.

The breach between Palmer and Christine was steadily widening. She was too proud to ask him to spend more of his evenings with her. On those occasions when he voluntarily stayed at home with her, he was so discontented that he drove her almost to distraction. Although she was convinced that he

was seeing nothing of the girl who had been with him the night of the accident, she did not trust him. Not that girl, perhaps, but there were others. There would always be others.

Into Christine's little parlor, then, K. turned, the evening after he had seen Tillie. She was reading by the lamp, and the door into the hall stood open.

"Come in," she said, as he hesitated in the doorway.

"I am frightfully dusty."

"There's a brush in the drawer of the hat-rack — although I don't really mind how you look."

The little room always cheered K. Its warmth and light appealed to his æsthetic sense; after the bareness of his bedroom, it spelled luxury. And perhaps, to be entirely frank, there was more than physical comfort and satisfaction in the evenings he spent in Christine's firelit parlor. He was entirely masculine, and her evident pleasure in his society gratified him. He had fallen into a way of thinking of himself as a sort of older brother to all the world because he was a sort of older brother to Sidney. But Christine's small coquetries were not lost on him. The evenings with her did something to reinstate him in his own self-esteem. It was subtle, psychological, but also it was very human.

"Come and sit down," said Christine. "Here's a chair, and here are cigarettes and there are matches. Now!"

But, for once, K. declined the chair. He stood in

front of the fireplace and looked down at her, his head bent slightly to one side.

"I wonder if you would like to do a very kind thing," he said unexpectedly.

"Make you coffee?"

"Something much more trouble and not so pleasant."

Christine glanced up at him. When she was with him, when his steady eyes looked down at her, small affectations fell away. She was more genuine with K. than with any one else, even herself.

"Tell me what it is, or shall I promise first?"

"I want you to promise just one thing: to keep a secret."

"Yours?"

Christine was not over-intelligent, perhaps, but she was shrewd. That Le Moyne's past held a secret she had felt from the beginning. She sat up with eager curiosity.

"No, not mine. Is it a promise?"

"Of course."

"I've found Tillie, Christine. I want you to go out to see her."

Christine's red lips parted. The Street did not go out to see women in Tillie's situation.

"But, K.!" she protested.

"She needs another woman just now. She's going to have a child, Christine; and she has had no one to talk to but her hus— but Mr. Schwitter and myself. She is depressed and not very well."

"But what shall I say to her? I'd really rather not go, K. Not," she hastened to set herself right in his eyes — "not that I feel any unwillingness to see her. I know you understand that. But — what in the world shall I say to her?"

"Say what your own kind heart prompts."

It had been rather a long time since Christine had been accused of having a kind heart. Not that she was unkind, but in all her self-centered young life there had been little call on her sympathies. Her eyes clouded.

"I wish I were as good as you think I am."

There was a little silence between them. Then Le Moyne spoke briskly: —

"I'll tell you how to get there; perhaps I would better write it."

He moved over to Christine's small writing-table and, seating himself, proceeded to write out the directions for reaching Hillfoot.

Behind him, Christine had taken his place on the hearth-rug and stood watching his head in the light of the desk-lamp. "What a strong, quiet face it is," she thought. Why did she get the impression of such a tremendous reserve power in this man who was a clerk, and a clerk only? Behind him she made a quick, unconscious gesture of appeal, both hands out for an instant. She dropped them guiltily as K. rose with the paper in his hand.

"I've drawn a sort of map of the roads," he began. "You see, this —"

Christine was looking, not at the paper, but up at him.

"I wonder if you know, K.," she said, "what a lucky woman the woman will be who marries you?"

He laughed good-humoredly.

"I wonder how long I could hypnotize her into thinking that."

He was still holding out the paper.

"I've had time to do a little thinking lately," she said, without bitterness. "Palmer is away so much now. I've been looking back, wondering if I ever thought that about him. I don't believe I ever did. I wonder —"

She checked herself abruptly and took the paper from his hand.

"I'll go to see Tillie, of course," she consented. "It is like you to have found her."

She sat down. Although she picked up the book that she had been reading with the evident intention of discussing it, her thoughts were still on Tillie, on Palmer, on herself. After a moment: —

"Has it ever occurred to you how terribly mixed up things are? Take this Street, for instance. Can you think of anybody on it that — that things have gone entirely right with?"

"It's a little world of its own, of course," said K., "and it has plenty of contact points with life. But wherever one finds people, many or few, one finds all the elements that make up life — joy and sorrow,

birth and death, and even tragedy. That's rather trite, is n't it?"

Christine was still pursuing her thoughts.

"Men are different," she said. "To a certain extent they make their own fates. But when you think of the women on the Street, — Tillie, Harriet Kennedy, Sidney Page, myself, even Mrs. Rosenfeld back in the alley, — somebody else moulds things for us, and all we can do is to sit back and suffer. I am beginning to think the world is a terrible place, K. Why do people so often marry the wrong people? Why can't a man care for one woman and only one all his life? Why — why is it all so complicated?"

"There are men who care for only one woman all their lives."

"You're that sort, are n't you?"

"I don't want to put myself on any pinnacle. If I cared enough for a woman to marry her, I'd hope to — But we are being very tragic, Christine."

"I feel tragic. There's going to be another mistake, K., unless you stop it."

He tried to leaven the conversation with a little fun.

"If you're going to ask me to interfere between Mrs. McKee and the deaf-and-dumb book and insurance agent, I shall do nothing of the sort. She can both speak and hear enough for both of them."

"I mean Sidney and Max Wilson. He's mad about her, K.; and, because she's the sort she is, he'll probably be mad about her all his life, even if

he marries her. But he'll not be true to her; I know the type now."

K. leaned back with a flicker of pain in his eyes.

"What can I do about it?"

Astute as he was, he did not suspect that Christine was using this method to fathom his feeling for Sidney. Perhaps she hardly knew it herself.

"You might marry her yourself, K."

But he had himself in hand by this time, and she learned nothing from either his voice or his eyes.

"On twenty dollars a week? And without so much as asking her consent?" He dropped his light tone. "I'm not in a position to marry anybody. Even if Sidney cared for me, which she does n't, of course —"

"Then you don't intend to interfere? You're going to let the Street see another failure?"

"I think you can understand," said K. rather wearily, "that if I cared less, Christine, it would be easier to interfere."

After all, Christine had known this, or surmised it, for weeks. But it hurt like a fresh stab in an old wound. It was K. who spoke again after a pause: —

"The deadly hard thing, of course, is to sit by and see things happening that one — that one would naturally try to prevent."

"I don't believe that you have always been of those who only stand and wait," said Christine. "Sometime, K., when you know me better and like me better, I want you to tell me about it, will you?"

"There's very little to tell. I held a trust. When I discovered that I was unfit to hold that trust any longer, I quit. That's all."

His tone of finality closed the discussion. But Christine's eyes were on him often that evening, puzzled, rather sad.

They talked of books, of music — Christine played well in a dashing way. K. had brought her soft, tender little things, and had stood over her until her noisy touch became gentle. She played for him a little, while he sat back in the big chair with his hand screening his eyes.

When, at last, he rose and picked up his cap, it was nine o'clock.

"I've taken your whole evening," he said remorsefully. "Why don't you tell me I am a nuisance and send me off?"

Christine was still at the piano, her hands on the keys. She spoke without looking at him: —

"You're never a nuisance, K., and —"

"You'll go out to see Tillie, won't you?"

"Yes. But I'll not go under false pretenses. I am going quite frankly because you want me to."

Something in her tone caught his attention.

"I forgot to tell you," she went on. "Father has given Palmer five thousand dollars. He's going to buy a share in a business."

"That's fine."

"Possibly. I don't believe much in Palmer's business ventures."

Her flat tone still held him. Underneath it he divined strain and repression.

"I hate to go and leave you alone," he said at last from the door. "Have you any idea when Palmer will be back?"

"Not the slightest. K., will you come here a moment? Stand behind me; I don't want to see you, and I want to tell you something."

He did as she bade him, rather puzzled.

"Here I am."

"I think I am a fool for saying this. Perhaps I am spoiling the only chance I have to get any happiness out of life. But I have got to say it. It's stronger than I am. I was terribly unhappy, K., and then you came into my life, and I — now I listen for your step in the hall. I can't be a hypocrite any longer, K."

When he stood behind her, silent and not moving, she turned slowly about and faced him. He towered there in the little room, grave eyes on hers.

"It's a long time since I have had a woman friend, Christine," he said soberly. "Your friendship has meant a good deal. In a good many ways, I'd not care to look ahead if it were not for you. I value our friendship so much that I —"

"That you don't want me to spoil it," she finished for him. "I know you don't care for me, K., not the way I — But I wanted you to know. It does n't hurt a good man to know such a thing. And it — is n't going to stop your coming here, is it?"

"Of course not," said K. heartily. "But to-morrow, when we are both clear-headed, we will talk this over. You are mistaken about this thing, Christine; I am sure of that. Things have not been going well, and just because I am always around, and all that sort of thing, you think things that are n't really so. I'm only a reaction, Christine."

He tried to make her smile up at him. But just then she could not smile.

If she had cried, things might have been different for every one; for perhaps K. would have taken her in his arms. He was heart-hungry enough, those days, for anything. And perhaps, too, being intuitive, Christine felt this. But she had no mind to force him into a situation against his will.

"It is because you are good," she said, and held out her hand. "Good-night."

Le Moyne took it and bent over and kissed it lightly. There was in the kiss all that he could not say of respect, of affection and understanding.

"Good-night, Christine," he said, and went into the hall and upstairs.

The lamp was not lighted in his room, but the street light glowed through the windows. Once again the waving fronds of the ailanthus tree flung ghostly shadows on the walls. There was a faint sweet odor of blossoms, so soon to become rank and heavy.

Over the floor in a wild zigzag darted a strip of white paper which disappeared under the bureau. Reginald was building another nest.

CHAPTER XXI

SIDNEY went into the operating-room late in the spring as the result of a conversation between the younger Wilson and the Head.

"When are you going to put my protégée into the operating-room?" asked Wilson, meeting Miss Gregg in a corridor one bright spring afternoon.

"That usually comes in the second year, Dr. Wilson."

He smiled down at her. "That is not a rule, is it?"

"Not exactly. Miss Page is very young, and of course there are other girls who have not yet had the experience. But, if you make the request —"

"I am going to have some good cases soon. I'll not make a request, of course; but, if you see fit, it would be good training for Miss Page."

Miss Gregg went on, knowing perfectly that at his next operation Dr. Wilson would expect Sidney Page in the operating-room. The other doctors were not so exigent. She would have liked to have all the staff old and settled, like Dr. O'Hara or the older Wilson. These young men came in and tore things up.

She sighed as she went on. There were so many things to go wrong. The butter had been bad — she must speak to the matron. The sterilizer in the operating-room was out of order — that meant a

quarrel with the chief engineer. Requisitions were too heavy — that meant going around to the wards and suggesting to the head nurses that lead pencils and bandages and adhesive plaster and safety-pins cost money.

It was particularly inconvenient to move Sidney just then. Carlotta Harrison was off duty, ill. She had been ailing for a month, and now she was down with a temperature. As the Head went toward Sidney's ward, her busy mind was playing her nurses in their wards like pieces on a checkerboard.

Sidney went into the operating-room that afternoon. For her blue uniform, kerchief, and cap she exchanged the hideous operating-room garb: long, straight white gown with short sleeves and mob-cap, gray-white from many sterilizations. But the ugly costume seemed to emphasize her beauty, as the habit of a nun often brings out the placid saintliness of her face.

The relationship between Sidney and Max had reached that point that occurs in all relationships between men and women: when things must either go forward or go back, but cannot remain as they are. The condition had existed for the last three months. It exasperated the man.

As a matter of fact, Wilson could not go ahead. The situation with Carlotta had become tense, irritating. He felt that she stood ready to block any move he made. He would not go back, and he dared not go forward.

If Sidney was puzzled, she kept it bravely to herself. In her little room at night, with the door carefully locked, she tried to think things out. There were a few treasures that she looked over regularly: a dried flower from the Christmas roses; a label that he had pasted playfully on the back of her hand one day after the rush of surgical dressings was over and which said: "℞, Take once and forever."

There was another piece of paper over which Sidney spent much time. It was a page torn out of an order book, and it read: "Sigsbee may have light diet; Rosenfeld massage." Underneath was written, very small: —

"*You are the most beautiful person in the world.*"

Two reasons had prompted Wilson to request to have Sidney in the operating-room. He wanted her with him, and he wanted her to see him at work: the age-old instinct of the male to have his woman see him at his best.

He was in high spirits that first day of Sidney's operating-room experience. For the time at least, Carlotta was out of the way. Her somber eyes no longer watched him. Once he looked up from his work and glanced at Sidney where she stood at strained attention.

"Feeling faint?" he said.

She colored under the eyes that were turned on her.

"No, Dr. Wilson."

"A great many of them faint on the first day. We sometimes have them lying all over the floor."

He challenged Miss Gregg with his eyes, and she reproved him with a shake of her head, as she might a bad boy.

One way and another, he managed to turn the attention of the operating-room to Sidney several times. It suited his whim, and it did more than that: it gave him a chance to speak to her in his teasing way.

Sidney came through the operation as if she had been through fire — taut as a string, rather pale, but undaunted. But when the last case had been taken out, Max dropped his bantering manner. The internes were looking over instruments; the nurses were busy on the hundred and one tasks of clearing up; so he had a chance for a word with her alone.

"I am proud of you, Sidney; you came through it like a soldier."

"You made it very hard for me."

A nurse was coming toward him; he had only a moment.

"I shall leave a note in the mail-box," he said quickly, and proceeded with the scrubbing of his hands which signified the end of the day's work.

The operations had lasted until late in the afternoon. The night nurses had taken up their stations; prayers were over. The internes were gathered in the smoking-room, threshing over the day's work, as

was their custom. When Sidney was free, she went to the office for the note. It was very brief: —

I have something I want to say to you, dear. I think you know what it is. I never see you alone at home any more. If you can get off for an hour, won't you take the trolley to the end of Division Street? I'll be there with the car at eight-thirty, and I promise to have you back by ten o'clock.

MAX.

The office was empty. No one saw her as she stood by the mail-box. The ticking of the office clock, the heavy rumble of a dray outside, the roll of the ambulance as it went out through the gateway, and in her hand the realization of what she had never confessed as a hope, even to herself! He, the great one, was going to stoop to her. It had been in his eyes that afternoon; it was there, in his letter, now.

It was eight by the office clock. To get out of her uniform and into street clothing, fifteen minutes; on the trolley, another fifteen. She would need to hurry.

But she did not meet him, after all. Miss Wardwell met her in the upper hall.

"Did you get my message?" she asked anxiously.

"What message?"

"Miss Harrison wants to see you. She has been moved to a private room."

Sidney glanced at K.'s little watch.

"Must she see me to-night?"

"She has been waiting for hours — ever since you went to the operating-room."

Sidney sighed, but she went to Carlotta at once. The girl's condition was puzzling the staff. There was talk of "T. R." — which is hospital for "typhoid restrictions." But T. R. has apathy, generally, and Carlotta was not apathetic. Sidney found her tossing restlessly on her high white bed, and put her cool hand over Carlotta's hot one.

"Did you send for me?"

"Hours ago." Then, seeing her operating-room uniform: "You've been *there*, have you?"

"Is there anything I can do, Carlotta?"

Excitement had dyed Sidney's cheeks with color and made her eyes luminous. The girl in the bed eyed her, and then abruptly drew her hand away.

"Were you going out?"

"Yes; but not right away."

"I'll not keep you if you have an engagement."

"The engagement will have to wait. I'm sorry you're ill. If you would like me to stay with you to-night —"

Carlotta shook her head on her pillow.

"Mercy, no!" she said irritably. "I'm only worn out. I need a rest. Are you going home to-night?"

"No," Sidney admitted, and flushed.

Nothing escaped Carlotta's eyes — the younger girl's radiance, her confusion, even her operating-room uniform and what it signified. How she hated

her, with her youth and freshness, her wide eyes, her soft red lips! And this engagement — she had the uncanny divination of fury.

"I was going to ask you to do something for me," she said shortly; "but I've changed my mind about it. Go on and keep your engagement."

To end the interview, she turned over and lay with her face to the wall. Sidney stood waiting uncertainly. All her training had been to ignore the irritability of the sick, and Carlotta was very ill; she could see that.

"Just remember that I am ready to do anything I can, Carlotta," she said. "Nothing will — will be a trouble."

She waited a moment, but, receiving no acknowledgement of her offer, she turned slowly and went toward the door.

"Sidney!"

She went back to the bed.

"Yes. Don't sit up, Carlotta. What is it?"

"I'm frightened!"

"You're feverish and nervous. There's nothing to be frightened about."

"If it's typhoid, I'm gone."

"That's childish. Of course you're not gone, or anything like it. Besides, it's probably not typhoid."

"I'm afraid to sleep. I doze for a little, and when I waken there are people in the room. They stand around the bed and talk about me."

Sidney's precious minutes were flying; but Car-

lotta had gone into a paroxysm of terror, holding to Sidney's hand and begging not to be left alone.

"I'm too young to die," she would whimper. And in the next breath: "I want to die — I don't want to live!"

The hands of the little watch pointed to eight-thirty when at last she lay quiet, with closed eyes. Sidney, tiptoeing to the door, was brought up short by her name again, this time in a more normal voice: —

"Sidney."

"Yes, dear."

"Perhaps you are right and I'm going to get over this."

"Certainly you are. Your nerves are playing tricks with you to-night."

"I'll tell you now why I sent for you."

"I'm listening."

"If — if I get very bad, — you know what I mean, — will you promise to do exactly what I tell you?"

"I promise, absolutely."

"My trunk key is in my pocket-book. There is a letter in the tray — just a name, no address on it. Promise to see that it is not delivered; that it is destroyed without being read."

Sidney promised promptly; and, because it was too late now for her meeting with Wilson, for the next hour she devoted herself to making Carlotta comfortable. So long as she was busy, a sort of ex-

altation of service upheld her. But when at last the night assistant came to sit with the sick girl, and Sidney was free, all the life faded from her face. He had waited for her and she had not come. Would he understand? Would he ask her to meet him again? Perhaps, after all, his question had not been what she had thought.

She went miserably to bed. K.'s little watch ticked under her pillow. Her stiff cap moved in the breeze as it swung from the corner of her mirror. Under her window passed and repassed the night life of the city — taxicabs, stealthy painted women, tired office-cleaners trudging home at midnight, a city patrol-wagon which rolled in through the gates to the hospital's always open door. When she could not sleep, she got up and padded to the window in bare feet. The light from a passing machine showed a youthful figure that looked like Joe Drummond.

Life, that had always seemed so simple, was growing very complicated for Sidney: Joe and K., Palmer and Christine, Johnny Rosenfeld, Carlotta — either lonely or tragic, all of them, or both. Life in the raw.

Toward morning Carlotta wakened. The night assistant was still there. It had been a quiet night, and she was asleep in her chair. To save her cap she had taken it off, and early streaks of silver showed in her hair.

Carlotta roused her ruthlessly.

"I want something from my trunk," she said.

The assistant wakened reluctantly, and looked

at her watch. Almost morning. She yawned and pinned on her cap.

"For Heaven's sake," she protested. "You don't want me to go to the trunk-room at this hour!"

"I can go myself," said Carlotta, and put her feet out of bed.

"What is it you want?"

"A letter on the top tray. If I wait my temperature will go up and I can't think."

"Shall I mail it for you?"

"Bring it here," said Carlotta shortly. "I want to destroy it."

The young woman went without haste, to show that a night assistant may do such things out of friendship, but not because she must. She stopped at the desk where the night nurse in charge of the rooms on that floor was filling out records.

"Give me twelve private patients to look after instead of one nurse like Carlotta Harrison!" she complained. "I've got to go to the trunk-room for her at this hour, and it next door to the mortuary!"

As the first rays of the summer sun came through the window, shadowing the fire-escape like a lattice on the wall of the little gray-walled room, Carlotta sat up in her bed and lighted the candle on the stand. The night assistant, who dreamed sometimes of fire, stood nervously by.

"Why don't you let me do it?" she asked irritably.

Carlotta did not reply at once. The candle was in her hand, and she was staring at the letter.

"Because I want to do it myself," she said at last, and thrust the envelope into the flame. It burned slowly, at first a thin blue flame tipped with yellow, then, eating its way with a small fine crackling, a widening, destroying blaze that left behind it black ash and destruction. The acrid odor of burning filled the room. Not until it was consumed, and the black ash fell into the saucer of the candlestick, did Carlotta speak again. Then: —

"If every fool of a woman who wrote a letter burnt it, there would be less trouble in the world," she said, and lay back among her pillows.

The assistant said nothing. She was sleepy and irritated, and she had crushed her best cap by letting the lid of Carlotta's trunk fall on her. She went out of the room with disapproval in every line of her back.

"She burned it," she informed the night nurse at her desk. "A letter to a man — one of her suitors, I suppose. The name was K. Le Moyne."

The deepening and broadening of Sidney's character had been very noticeable in the last few months. She had gained in decision without becoming hard; had learned to see things as they are, not through the rose mist of early girlhood; and, far from being daunted, had developed a philosophy that had for its basis God in His heaven and all well with the world.

But her new theory of acceptance did not comprehend everything. She was in a state of wild revolt, for instance, as to Johnny Rosenfeld, and more remotely but not less deeply concerned over Grace Irving. Soon she was to learn of Tillie's predicament, and to take up the cudgels valiantly for her.

But her revolt was to be for herself too. On the day after her failure to keep her appointment with Wilson she had her half-holiday. No word had come from him, and when, after a restless night, she went to her new station in the operating-room, it was to learn that he had been called out of the city in consultation and would not operate that day. O'Hara would take advantage of the free afternoon to run in some odds and ends of cases.

The operating-room made gauze that morning, and small packets of tampons: absorbent cotton covered with sterilized gauze, and fastened together — twelve, by careful count, in each bundle.

Miss Grange, who had been kind to Sidney in her probation months, taught her the method.

"Used instead of sponges," she explained. "If you noticed yesterday, they were counted before and after each operation. One of these missing is worse than a bank clerk out a dollar at the end of the day. There's no closing up until it's found!"

Sidney eyed the small packet before her anxiously.

"What a hideous responsibility!" she said.

From that time on she handled the small gauze sponges almost reverently.

The operating-room — all glass, white enamel and shining nickel-plate — first frightened, then thrilled her. It was as if, having loved a great actor, she now trod the enchanted boards on which he achieved his triumphs. She was glad that it was her afternoon off, and that she would not see some lesser star — O'Hara, to wit — usurping his place.

But Max had not sent her any word. That hurt. He must have known that she had been delayed.

The operating-room was a hive of industry, and tongues kept pace with fingers. The hospital was a world, like the Street. The nurses had come from many places, and, like cloistered nuns, seemed to have left the other world behind. A new President of the country was less real than a new interne. The country might wash its soiled linen in public; what was that compared with enough sheets and towels for the wards? Big buildings were going up in the city. Ah! but the hospital took cognizance of that, gathering as it did a toll from each new story added. What news of the world came in through the great doors was translated at once into hospital terms. What the city forgot the hospital remembered. It took up life where the town left it at its gates, and carried it on or saw it ended, as the case might be. So these young women knew the ending of many stories, the beginning of some; but of none did they know both the first and last, the beginning and the end.

By many small kindnesses Sidney had made herself popular. And there was more to it than that.

She never shirked. The other girls had the respect for her of one honest worker for another. The episode that had caused her suspension seemed entirely forgotten. They showed her carefully what she was to do; and, because she must know the "why" of everything, they explained as best they could.

It was while she was standing by the great sterilizer that she heard, through an open door, part of a conversation that sent her through the day with her world in revolt.

The talkers were putting the anæsthetizing-room in readiness for the afternoon. Sidney, waiting for the time to open the sterilizer, was busy, for the first time in her hurried morning, with her own thoughts. Because she was very human, there was a little exultation in her mind. What would these girls say when they learned of how things stood between her and their hero — that, out of all his world of society and clubs and beautiful women, he was going to choose her?

Not shameful, this: the honest pride of a woman in being chosen from many.

The voices were very clear.

"Typhoid! Of course not. She's eating her heart out."

"Do you think he has really broken with her?"

"Probably not. She knows it's coming; that's all."

"Sometimes I have wondered —"

"So have others. She ought n't to be here, of course. But among so many there is bound to be one now and then who — who is n't quite —"

She hesitated, at a loss for a word.

"Did you — did you ever think over that trouble with Miss Page about the medicines? That would have been easy, and like her."

"She hates Miss Page, of course, but I hardly think — If that's true, it was nearly murder."

There were two voices, a young one, full of soft Southern inflections, and an older voice, a trifle hard, as from disillusion.

They were working as they talked. Sidney could hear the clatter of bottles on the tray, the scraping of a moved table.

"He was crazy about her last fall."

"Miss Page?" (The younger voice, with a thrill in it.)

"Carlotta. Of course this is confidential."

"Surely."

"I saw her with him in his car one evening. And on her vacation last summer —"

The voices dropped to a whisper. Sidney, standing cold and white by the sterilizer, put out a hand to steady herself. So that was it! No wonder Carlotta had hated her. And those whispering voices! What were they saying? How hateful life was, and men and women. Must there always be something hideous in the background? Until now she had only seen life. Now she felt its hot breath on her cheek.

She was steady enough in a moment, cool and calm, moving about her work with ice-cold hands and slightly narrowed eyes. To a sort of physical nausea was succeeding anger, a blind fury of injured pride. He had been in love with Carlotta and had tired of her. He was bringing her his warmed-over emotions. She remembered the bitterness of her month's exile, and its probable cause. Max had stood by her then. Well he might, if he suspected the truth.

For just a moment she had an illuminating flash of Wilson as he really was, selfish and self-indulgent, just a trifle too carefully dressed, daring as to eye and speech, with a carefully calculated daring, frankly pleasure-loving. She put her hands over her eyes.

The voices in the next room had risen above their whisper.

"Genius has privileges, of course," said the older voice. "He is a very great surgeon. To-morrow he is to do the Edwardes operation again. I am glad I am to see him do it."

Sidney still held her hands over her eyes. He *was* a great surgeon: in his hands he held the keys of life and death. And perhaps he had never cared for Carlotta: she might have thrown herself at him. He was a man, at the mercy of any scheming woman.

She tried to summon his image to her aid. But a curious thing happened. She could not visualize him. Instead, there came, clear and distinct, a

picture of K. Le Moyne in the hall of the little house, reaching one of his long arms to the chandelier over his head and looking up at her as she stood on the stairs.

CHAPTER XXII

"My God, Sidney, I'm asking you to marry me!"

"I — I know that. I am asking you something else, Max."

"I have never been in love with her."

His voice was sulky. He had drawn the car close to a bank, and they were sitting in the shade, on the grass. It was the Sunday afternoon after Sidney's experience in the operating-room.

"You took her out, Max, did n't you?"

"A few times, yes. She seemed to have no friends. I was sorry for her."

"That was all?"

"Absolutely. Good Heavens, you've put me through a catechism in the last ten minutes!"

"If my father were living, or even mother, I — one of them would have done this for me, Max. I'm sorry I had to. I've been very wretched for several days."

It was the first encouragement she had given him. There was no coquetry about her aloofness. It was only that her faith in him had had a shock and was slow of reviving.

"You are very, very lovely, Sidney. I wonder if you have any idea what you mean to me?"

"You meant a great deal to me, too," she said

frankly, "until a few days ago. I thought you were the greatest man I had ever known, and the best. And then— I think I'd better tell you what I overheard. I did n't try to hear. It just happened that way."

He listened doggedly to her account of the hospital gossip, doggedly and with a sinking sense of fear, not of the talk, but of Carlotta herself. Usually one might count on the woman's silence, her instinct for self-protection. But Carlotta was different. Damn the girl, anyhow! She had known from the start that the affair was a temporary one; he had never pretended anything else.

There was silence for a moment after Sidney finished. Then: —

"You are not a child any longer, Sidney. You have learned a great deal in this last year. One of the things you know is that almost every man has small affairs, many of them sometimes, before he finds the woman he wants to marry. When he finds her, the others are all off — there's nothing to them. It's the real thing then, instead of the sham."

"Palmer was very much in love with Christine, and yet —"

"Palmer is a cad."

"I don't want you to think I'm making terms. I'm not. But if this thing went on, and I found out afterward that you — that there was any one else, it would kill me."

"Then you care, after all!"

There was something boyish in his triumph, in the very gesture with which he held out his arms, like a child who has escaped a whipping. He stood up and, catching her hands, drew her to her feet. "You love me, dear."

"I'm afraid I do, Max."

"Then I'm yours, and only yours, if you want me," he said, and took her in his arms.

He was riotously happy, must hold her off for the joy of drawing her to him again, must pull off her gloves and kiss her soft bare palms.

"I love you, love you!" he cried, and bent down to bury his face in the warm hollow of her neck.

Sidney glowed under his caresses — was rather startled at his passion, a little ashamed.

"Tell me you love me a little bit. Say it."

"I love you," said Sidney, and flushed scarlet.

But even in his arms, with the warm sunlight on his radiant face, with his lips to her ear, whispering the divine absurdities of passion, in the back of her obstinate little head was the thought that, while she had given him her first embrace, he had held other women in his arms. It made her passive, prevented her complete surrender.

And after a time he resented it. "You are only letting me love you," he complained. "I don't believe you care, after all."

He freed her, took a step back from her.

"I am afraid I am jealous," she said simply. "I keep thinking of — of Carlotta."

"Will it help any if I swear that that is off absolutely?"

"Don't be absurd. It is enough to have you say so."

But he insisted on swearing, standing with one hand upraised, his eyes on her. The Sunday landscape was very still, save for the hum of busy insect life. A mile or so away, at the foot of two hills, lay a white farmhouse with its barn and outbuildings. In a small room in the barn a woman sat; and because it was Sunday, and she could not sew, she read her Bible.

"— and that after this there will be only one woman for me," finished Max, and dropped his hand. He bent over and kissed Sidney on the lips.

At the white farmhouse, a little man stood in the doorway and surveyed the road with eyes shaded by a shirt-sleeved arm. Behind him, in a darkened room, a barkeeper was wiping the bar with a clean cloth.

"I guess I'll go and get my coat on, Bill," said the little man heavily. "They're starting to come now. I see a machine about a mile down the road."

Sidney broke the news of her engagement to K. herself, the evening of the same day. The little house was quiet when she got out of the car at the door. Harriet was asleep on the couch at the foot of her bed, and Christine's rooms were empty. She

found Katie on the back porch, mountains of Sunday newspapers piled around her.

"I'd about give you up," said Katie. "I was thinking, rather than see your ice-cream that's left from dinner melt and go to waste, I'd take it around to the Rosenfelds."

"Please take it to them. I'd really rather they had it."

She stood in front of Katie, drawing off her gloves.

"Aunt Harriet's asleep. Is — is Mr. Le Moyne around?"

"You're gettin' prettier every day, Miss Sidney. Is that the blue suit Miss Harriet said she made for you? It's right stylish. I'd like to see the back."

Sidney obediently turned, and Katie admired.

"When I think how things have turned out!" she reflected. "You in a hospital, doing God knows what for all sorts of people, and Miss Harriet making a suit like that and asking a hundred dollars for it, and that tony that a person does n't dare to speak to her when she's in the dining-room. And your poor ma . . . well, it's all in a lifetime! No; Mr. K.'s not here. He and Mrs. Howe are gallivanting around together."

"Katie!"

"Well, that's what I call it. I'm not blind. Don't I hear her dressing up about four o'clock every afternoon, and, when she's all ready, sittin' in the parlor with the door open, and a book on her knee, as if she'd been reading all afternoon? If he does n't

stop, she's at the foot of the stairs, calling up to him. 'K.,' she says, 'K., I'm waiting to ask you something!' or, 'K., would n't you like a cup of tea?' She's always feedin' him tea and cake, so that when he comes to table he won't eat honest victuals."

Sidney had paused with one glove half off. Katie's tone carried conviction. Was life making another of its queer errors, and were Christine and K. in love with each other? K. had always been *her* friend, *her* confidant. To give him up to Christine — she shook herself impatiently. What had come over her? Why not be glad that he had some sort of companionship?

She went upstairs to the room that had been her mother's, and took off her hat. She wanted to be alone, to realize what had happened to her. She did not belong to herself any more. It gave her an odd, lost feeling. She was going to be married — not very soon, but ultimately. A year ago her half promise to Joe had gratified her sense of romance. She was loved, and she had thrilled to it.

But this was different. Marriage, that had been but a vision then, loomed large, almost menacing. She had learned the law of compensation: that for every joy one pays in suffering. Women who married went down into the valley of death for their children. One must love and be loved very tenderly to pay for that. The scale must balance.

And there were other things. Women grew old, and age was not always lovely. This very maternity — was it not fatal to beauty? Visions of child-bear-

ing women in the hospitals, with sagging breasts and relaxed bodies, came to her. That was a part of the price.

Harriet was stirring, across the hall. Sidney could hear her moving about with flat, inelastic steps.

That was the alternative. One married, happily or not as the case might be, and took the risk. Or one stayed single, like Harriet, growing a little hard, exchanging slimness for leanness and austerity of figure, flat-chested, thin-voiced. One blossomed and withered, then, or one shriveled up without having flowered. All at once it seemed very terrible to her. She felt as if she had been caught in an inexorable hand that had closed about her.

Harriet found her a little later, face down on her mother's bed, crying as if her heart would break. She scolded her roundly.

"You've been overworking," she said. "You've been getting thinner. Your measurements for that suit showed it. I have never approved of this hospital training, and after last January —"

She could hardly credit her senses when Sidney, still swollen with weeping, told her of her engagement.

"But I don't understand. If you care for him and he has asked you to marry him, why on earth are you crying your eyes out?"

"I do care. I don't know why I cried. It just came over me, all at once, that I — It was just foolishness. I am very happy, Aunt Harriet."

Harriet thought she understood. The girl needed her mother, and she, Harriet, was a hard, middle-aged woman and a poor substitute. She patted Sidney's moist hand.

"I guess I understand," she said. "I'll attend to your wedding things, Sidney. We'll show this street that even Christine Lorenz can be outdone." And, as an afterthought: "I hope Max Wilson will settle down now. He's been none too steady."

K. had taken Christine to see Tillie that Sunday afternoon. Palmer had the car out — had, indeed, not been home since the morning of the previous day. He played golf every Saturday afternoon and Sunday at the Country Club, and invariably spent the night there. So K. and Christine walked from the end of the trolley line, saying little, but under K.'s keen direction finding bright birds in the hedgerows, hidden field flowers, a dozen wonders of the country that Christine had never dreamed of.

The interview with Tillie had been a disappointment to K. Christine, with the best and kindliest intentions, struck a wrong note. In her endeavor to cover the fact that everything in Tillie's world was wrong, she fell into the error of pretending that everything was right.

Tillie, grotesque of figure and tragic-eyed, listened to her patiently, while K. stood, uneasy and uncomfortable, in the wide door of the hay-barn and watched automobiles turning in from the road

When Christine rose to leave, she confessed her failure frankly.

"I've meant well, Tillie," she said. "I'm afraid I've said exactly what I should n't. I can only think that, no matter what is wrong, two wonderful pieces of luck have come to you. Your husband — that is, Mr. Schwitter — cares for you, — you admit that, — and you are going to have a child."

Tillie's pale eyes filled.

"I used to be a good woman, Mrs. Howe," she said simply. "Now I'm not. When I look in that glass at myself, and call myself what I am, I'd give a good bit to be back on the Street again."

She found opportunity for a word with K. while Christine went ahead of him out of the barn.

"I've been wanting to speak to you, Mr. Le Moyne." She lowered her voice. "Joe Drummond's been coming out here pretty regular. Schwitter says he's drinking a little. He don't like him loafing around here: he sent him home last Sunday. What's come over the boy?"

"I'll talk to him."

"The barkeeper says he carries a revolver around, and talks wild. I thought maybe Sidney Page could do something with him."

"I think he'd not like her to know. I'll do what I can."

K.'s face was thoughtful as he followed Christine to the road.

Christine was very silent on the way back to the

city. More than once K. found her eyes fixed on him, and it puzzled him. Poor Christine was only trying to fit him into the world she knew — a world whose men were strong but seldom tender, who gave up their Sundays to golf, not to visiting unhappy outcasts in the country. How masculine he was, and yet how gentle! It gave her a choking feeling in her throat. She took advantage of a steep bit of road to stop and stand a moment, her fingers on his shabby gray sleeve.

It was late when they got home. Sidney was sitting on the low step, waiting for them.

Wilson had come across at seven, impatient because he must see a case that evening, and promising an early return. In the little hall he had drawn her to him and kissed her, this time not on the lips, but on the forehead and on each of her white eyelids.

"Little wife-to-be!" he had said, and was rather ashamed of his own emotion. From across the Street, as he got into his car, he had waved his hand to her.

Christine went to her room, and, with a long breath of content, K. folded up his long length on the step below Sidney.

"Well, dear ministering angel," he said, "how goes the world?"

"Things have been happening, K."

He sat erect and looked at her. Perhaps because she had a woman's instinct for making the most of a piece of news, perhaps — more likely, indeed — because she divined that the announcement would

not be entirely agreeable, she delayed it, played with it.

"I have gone into the operating-room."

"Fine!"

"The costume is ugly. I look hideous in it."

"Doubtless."

He smiled up at her. There was relief in his eyes, and still a question.

"Is that all the news?"

"There is something else, K."

It was a moment before he spoke. He sat looking ahead, his face set. Apparently he did not wish to hear her say it; for when, after a moment, he spoke, it was to forestall her, after all.

"I think I know what it is, Sidney."

"You expected it. did n't you?"

"I — it's not an entire surprise."

"Are n't you going to wish me happiness?"

"If my wishing could bring anything good to you, you would have everything in the world."

His voice was not entirely steady, but his eyes smiled into hers.

"Am I — are we going to lose you soon?"

"I shall finish my training. I made that a condition."

Then, in a burst of confidence: —

"I know so little, K., and he knows so much! I am going to read and study, so that he can talk to me about his work. That's what marriage ought to be, a sort of partnership. Don't you think so?"

K. nodded. His mind refused to go forward to the unthinkable future. Instead, he was looking back — back to those days when he had hoped sometime to have a wife to talk to about his work, that beloved work that was no longer his. And, finding it agonizing, as indeed all thought was that summer night, he dwelt for a moment on that evening, a year before, when in the same June moonlight, he had come up the Street and had seen Sidney where she was now, with the tree shadows playing over her.

Even that first evening he had been jealous.

It had been Joe then. Now it was another and older man, daring, intelligent, unscrupulous. And this time he had lost her absolutely, lost her without a struggle to keep her. His only struggle had been with himself, to remember that he had nothing to offer but failure.

"Do you know," said Sidney suddenly, "that it is almost a year since that night you came up the Street, and I was here on the steps?"

"That's a fact, is n't it!" He managed to get some surprise into his voice.

"How Joe objected to your coming! Poor Joe!"

"Do you ever see him?"

"Hardly ever now. I think he hates me."

"Why?"

"Because — well, you know, K. Why do men always hate a woman who just happens not to love them?"

"I don't believe they do. It would be much bet-

ter for them if they could. As a matter of fact, there are poor devils who go through life trying to do that very thing, and failing."

Sidney's eyes were on the tall house across. It was Dr. Ed's evening office hour, and through the open window she could see a line of people waiting their turn. They sat immobile, inert, doggedly patient, until the opening of the back office door promoted them all one chair toward the consulting-room.

"I shall be just across the Street," she said at last. "Nearer than I am at the hospital."

"You will be much farther away. You will be married."

"But we will still be friends, K.?"

Her voice was anxious, a little puzzled. She was often puzzled with him.

"Of course."

But, after another silence, he astounded her. She had fallen into the way of thinking of him as always belonging to the house, even, in a sense, belonging to her. And now —

"Shall you mind very much if I tell you that I am thinking of going away?"

"K.!"

"My dear child, you do not need a roomer here any more. I have always received infinitely more than I have paid for, even in the small services I have been able to render. Your Aunt Harriet is prosperous. You are away, and some day you are

going to be married. Don't you see — I am not needed?"

"That does not mean you are not wanted."

"I shall not go far. I'll always be near enough, so that I can see you" — he changed this hastily — "so that we can still meet and talk things over. Old friends ought to be like that, not too near, but to be turned on when needed, like a tap."

"Where will you go?"

"The Rosenfelds are rather in straits. I thought of helping them to get a small house somewhere and of taking a room with them. It's largely a matter of furniture. If they could furnish it even plainly, it could be done. I — have n't saved anything."

"Do you ever think of yourself?" she cried. "Have you always gone through life helping people, K.? Save anything! I should think not! You spend it all on others." She bent over and put her hand on his shoulder. "It will not be home without you, K."

To save him, he could not have spoken just then. A riot of rebellion surged up in him, that he must let this best thing in his life go out of it. To go empty of heart through the rest of his days, while his very arms ached to hold her! And she was so near — just above, with her hand on his shoulder, her wistful face so close that, without moving, he could have brushed her hair.

"You have not wished me happiness, K. Do you remember, when I was going to the hospital

and you gave me the little watch — do you remember what you said?"

"Yes" — huskily.

"Will you say it again?"

"But that was good-bye."

"Is n't this, in a way? You are going to leave us, and I — say it, K."

"Good-bye, dear, and — God bless you."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE announcement of Sidney's engagement was not to be made for a year. Wilson, chafing under the delay, was obliged to admit to himself that it was best. Many things could happen in a year. Carlotta would have finished her training, and by that time would probably be reconciled to the ending of their relationship.

He intended to end that. He had meant every word of what he had sworn to Sidney. He was genuinely in love, even unselfishly — as far as he could be unselfish. The secret was to be carefully kept also for Sidney's sake. The hospital did not approve of engagements between nurses and the staff. It was disorganizing, bad for discipline.

Sidney was very happy all that summer. She glowed with pride when her lover put through a difficult piece of work; flushed and palpitated when she heard his praises sung; grew to know, by a sort of intuition, when he was in the house. She wore his ring on a fine chain around her neck, and grew prettier every day.

Once or twice, however, when she was at home, away from the glamour, her early fears obsessed her. Would he always love her? He was so handsome and so gifted, and there were women who were mad about him. That was the gossip of the hospital

Suppose she married him and he tired of her? In her humility she thought that perhaps only her youth, and such charm as she had that belonged to youth, held him. And before her, always, she saw the tragic women of the wards.

K. had postponed his leaving until fall. Sidney had been insistent, and Harriet had topped the argument in her businesslike way. "If you insist on being an idiot and adopting the Rosenfeld family," she said, "wait until September. The season for boarders does n't begin until fall."

So K. waited for "the season," and ate his heart out for Sidney in the interval.

Johnny Rosenfeld still lay in his ward, inert from the waist down. K. was his most frequent visitor. As a matter of fact, he was watching the boy closely, at Max Wilson's request.

"Tell me when I'm to do it," said Wilson, "and when the time comes, for God's sake, stand by me. Come to the operation. He's got so much confidence that I'll help him that I don't dare to fail."

So K. came on visiting days, and, by special dispensation, on Saturday afternoons. He was teaching the boy basket-making. Not that he knew anything about it himself; but, by means of a blind teacher, he kept just one lesson ahead. The ward was intensely interested. It found something absurd and rather touching in this tall, serious young man with the surprisingly deft fingers, tying raffia knots.

The first basket went, by Johnny's request, to Sidney Page.

"I want her to have it," he said. "She got corns on her fingers from rubbing me when I came in first; and, besides —"

"Yes?" said K. He was tying a most complicated knot, and could not look up.

"I know something," said Johnny. "I'm not going to get in wrong by talking, but I know something. You give her the basket."

K. looked up then, and surprised Johnny's secret in his face.

"Ah!" he said.

"If I'd squealed she'd have finished me for good. They've got me, you know. I'm not running in 2.40 these days."

"I'll not tell, or make it uncomfortable for you. What do you know?"

Johnny looked around. The ward was in the somnolence of mid-afternoon. The nearest patient, a man in a wheel-chair, was snoring heavily.

"It was the dark-eyed one that changed the medicine on me," he said. "The one with the heels that were always tapping around, waking me up. She did it: I saw her."

After all, it was only what K. had suspected before. But a sense of impending danger to Sidney obsessed him. If Carlotta would do that, what would she do when she learned of the engagement? And he had known her before. He believed she was

totally unscrupulous. The odd coincidence of their paths crossing again troubled him.

Carlotta Harrison was well again, and back on duty. Luckily for Sidney, her three months' service in the operating-room kept them apart. For Carlotta was now not merely jealous. She found herself neglected, ignored. It ate her like a fever.

But she did not yet suspect an engagement. It had been her theory that Wilson would not marry easily — that, in a sense, he would have to be coerced into marriage. Some clever woman would marry him some day, and no one would be more astonished than himself. She thought merely that Sidney was playing a game like her own, with different weapons. So she planned her battle, ignorant that she had lost already.

Her method was simple enough. She stopped sulking, met Max with smiles, made no overtures toward a renewal of their relations. At first this annoyed him. Later it piqued him. To desert a woman was justifiable, under certain circumstances. But to desert a woman, and have her apparently not even know it, was against the rules of the game.

During a surgical dressing in a private room, one day, he allowed his fingers to touch hers, as on that day a year before when she had taken Miss Simpson's place in his office. He was rewarded by the same slow, smouldering glance that had caught his attention before. So she was only acting indifference!

Then Carlotta made her second move. A new interne had come into the house, and was going through the process of learning that from a senior at the medical school to a half-baked junior interne is a long step back. He had to endure the good-humored contempt of the older men, the patronizing instructions of nurses as to rules.

Carlotta alone treated him with deference. His uneasy rounds in Carlotta's precinct took on the state and form of staff visitations. She flattered, cajoled, looked up to him.

After a time it dawned on Wilson that this junior cub was getting more attention than himself: that, wherever he happened to be, somewhere in the offing would be Carlotta and the Lamb, the latter eyeing her with worship. Her indifference had only piqued him. The enthroning of a successor galled him. Between them, the Lamb suffered mightily — was subject to frequent "bawling out," as he termed it, in the operating-room as he assisted the anæsthetist. He took his troubles to Carlotta, who soothed him in the corridor — in plain sight of her quarry, of course — by putting a sympathetic hand on his sleeve.

Then, one day, Wilson was goaded to speech.

"For the love of Heaven, Carlotta," he said impatiently, "stop making love to that wretched boy. He wriggles like a worm if you look at him."

"I like him. He is thoroughly genuine. I respect him, and — he respects me."

"It's rather a silly game, you know."

"What game?"

"Do you think I don't understand?"

"Perhaps you do. I — I don't really care a lot about him, Max. But I've been down-hearted. He cheers me up."

Her attraction for him was almost gone — not quite. He felt rather sorry for her.

"I'm sorry. Then you are not angry with me?"

"Angry? No." She lifted her eyes to his, and for once she was not acting. "I knew it would end, of course. I have lost a — a lover. I expected that. But I wanted to keep a friend."

It was the right note. Why, after all, should he not be her friend? He had treated her cruelly, hideously. If she still desired his friendship, there was no disloyalty to Sidney in giving it. And Carlotta was very careful. Not once again did she allow him to see what lay in her eyes. She told him of her worries. Her training was almost over. She had a chance to take up institutional work. She abhorred the thought of private duty. What would he advise?

The Lamb was hovering near, hot eyes on them both. It was no place to talk.

"Come to the office and we'll talk it over."

"I don't like to go there; Miss Simpson is suspicious."

The institution she spoke of was in another city. It occurred to Wilson that if she took it the affair would have reached a graceful and legitimate end.

Also, the thought of another stolen evening alone with her was not unpleasant. It would be the last, he promised himself. After all, it was owing to her. He had treated her badly.

Sidney would be at a lecture that night. The evening loomed temptingly free.

"Suppose you meet me at the old corner," he said carelessly, eyes on the Lamb, who was forgetting that he was only a junior interne and was glaring ferociously. "We'll run out into the country and talk things over."

She demurred, with her heart beating triumphantly.

"What's the use of going back to that? It's over, is n't it?"

Her objection made him determined. When at last she had yielded, and he made his way down to the smoking-room, it was with the feeling that he had won a victory.

K. had been uneasy all that day; his ledgers irritated him. He had been sleeping badly since Sidney's announcement of her engagement. At five o'clock, when he left the office, he found Joe Drummond waiting outside on the pavement.

"Mother said you'd been up to see me a couple of times. I thought I'd come around."

K. looked at his watch.

"What do you say to a walk?"

"Not out in the country. I'm not as muscular

as you are. I'll go about town for a half-hour or so."

Thus forestalled, K. found his subject hard to lead up to. But here again Joe met him more than half-way.

"Well, go on," he said, when they found themselves in the park; "I don't suppose you were paying a call."

"No."

"I guess I know what you are going to say."

"I'm not going to preach, if you're expecting that. Ordinarily, if a man insists on making a fool of himself, I let him alone."

"Why make an exception of me?"

"One reason is that I happen to like you. The other reason is that, whether you admit it or not, you are acting like a young idiot, and are putting the responsibility on the shoulders of some one else."

"She is responsible, is n't she?"

"Not in the least. How old are you, Joe?"

"Twenty-three, almost."

"Exactly. You are a man, and you are acting like a bad boy. It's a disappointment to me. It's more than that to Sidney."

"Much she cares! She's going to marry Wilson, is n't she?"

"There is no announcement of any engagement."

"She is, and you know it. Well, she'll be happy — not! If I'd go to her to-night and tell her what I know, she'd never see him again."

The idea, thus born in his overwrought brain, obsessed him. He returned to it again and again. Le Moyne was uneasy. He was not certain that the boy's statement had any basis in fact. His single determination was to save Sidney from any pain.

When Joe suddenly announced his inclination to go out into the country after all, he suspected a ruse to get rid of him, and insisted on going along. Joe consented grudgingly.

"Car's at Bailey's garage," he said sullenly. "I don't know when I'll get back."

"That won't matter." K.'s tone was cheerful 'I'm not sleeping, anyhow."

That passed unnoticed until they were on the highroad, with the car running smoothly between yellowing fields of wheat. Then: —

"So you've got it too!" he said. "We're a fine pair of fools. We'd both be better off if I sent the car over a bank."

He gave the wheel a reckless twist, and Le Moyne called him to time sternly.

They had supper at the White Springs Hotel — not on the terrace, but in the little room where Carlotta and Wilson had taken their first meal together. K. ordered beer for them both, and Joe submitted with bad grace.

But the meal cheered and steadied him. K. found him more amenable to reason, and, gaining his confidence, learned of his desire to leave the city.

"I'm stuck here," he said. "I'm the only one,

and mother yells blue murder when I talk about it. I want to go to Cuba. My uncle owns a farm down there."

"Perhaps I can talk your mother over. I've been there."

Joe was all interest. His dilated pupils became more normal, his restless hands grew quiet. K.'s even voice, the picture he drew of life on the island, the stillness of the little hotel in its mid-week dullness, seemed to quiet the boy's tortured nerves. He was nearer to peace than he had been for many days. But he smoked incessantly, lighting one cigarette from another.

At ten o'clock he left K. and went for the car. He paused for a moment, rather sheepishly, by K.'s chair.

"I'm feeling a lot better," he said. "I have n't got the band around my head. You talk to mother."

That was the last K. saw of Joe Drummond until the next day.

CHAPTER XXIV

CARLOTTA dressed herself with unusual care — not in black this time, but in white. She coiled her yellow hair in a soft knot at the back of her head, and she resorted to the faintest shading of rouge. She intended to be gay, cheerful. The ride was to be a bright spot in Wilson's memory. He expected recriminations; she meant to make him happy. That was the secret of the charm some women had for men. They went to such women to forget their troubles. She set the hour of their meeting at nine, when the late dusk of summer had fallen; and she met him then, smiling, a faintly perfumed white figure, slim and young, with a thrill in her voice that was only half assumed.

"It's very late," he complained. "Surely you are not going to be back at ten."

"I have special permission to be out late."

"Good!" And then, recollecting their new situation: "We have a lot to talk over. It will take time."

At the White Springs Hotel they stopped to fill the gasolene tank of the car. Joe Drummond saw Wilson there, in the sheet-iron garage alongside of the road. The Wilson car was in the shadow. It did not occur to Joe that the white figure in the car was not Sidney. He went rather white, and stepped out

of the zone of light. The influence of Le Moyne was still on him, however, and he went on quietly with what he was doing. But his hands shook as he filled the radiator.

When Wilson's car had gone on, he went automatically about his preparations for the return trip — lifted a seat cushion to investigate his own store of gasolene, replacing carefully the revolver he always carried under the seat and packed in waste to prevent its accidental discharge, lighted his lamps, examined a loose brake-band.

His coolness gratified him. He had been an ass: Le Moyne was right. He'd get away — to Cuba if he could — and start over again. He would forget the Street and let it forget him.

The men in the garage were talking.

"To Schwitter's, of course," one of them grumbled. "We might as well go out of business."

"There's no money in running a straight place. Schwitter and half a dozen others are getting rich."

"That was Wilson, the surgeon in town. He cut off my brother-in-law's leg — charged him as much as if he had grown a new one for him. He used to come here. Now he goes on to Schwitter's, like the rest. Pretty girl he had with him. You can bet on Wilson."

So Max Wilson was taking Sidney to Schwitter's, making her the butt of garage talk! The smiles of the men were evil. Joe's hands grew cold, his head hot. A red mist spread between him and the line of

electric lights. He knew Schwitter's, and he knew Wilson.

He flung himself into his car and threw the throttle open. The car jerked, stalled.

"You can't start like that, son," one of the men remonstrated. "You let 'er in too fast."

"You go to hell!" Joe snarled, and made a second ineffectual effort.

Thus adjured, the men offered neither further advice nor assistance. The minutes went by in useless cranking — fifteen. The red mist grew heavier. Every lamp was a danger signal. But when K., growing uneasy, came out into the yard, the engine had started at last. He was in time to see Joe run his car into the road and turn it viciously toward Schwitter's.

Carlotta's nearness was having its calculated effect on Max Wilson. His spirits rose as the engine, marking perfect time, carried them along the quiet roads.

Partly it was reaction — relief that she should be so reasonable, so complaisant — and a sort of holiday spirit after the day's hard work. Oddly enough, and not so irrational as may appear, Sidney formed a part of the evening's happiness — that she loved him; that, back in the lecture-room, eyes and even mind on the lecturer, her heart was with him.

So, with Sidney the basis of his happiness, he made the most of his evening's freedom. He sang a little in his clear tenor — even, once when they had

slowed down at a crossing, bent over audaciously and kissed Carlotta's hand in the full glare of a passing train.

"How reckless of you!"

"I like to be reckless," he replied.

His boyishness annoyed Carlotta. She did not want the situation to get out of hand. Moreover, what was so real for her was only too plainly a lark for him. She began to doubt her power.

The hopelessness of her situation was dawning on her. Even when the touch of her beside him and the solitude of the country roads got in his blood, and he bent toward her, she found no encouragement in his words: —

"I am mad about you to-night."

She took her courage in her hands: —

"Then why give me up for some one else?"

"That's — different."

"Why is it different? I am a woman. I — I love you, Max. No one else will ever care as I do."

"You are in love with the Lamb!"

"That was a trick. I'm sorry, Max. I don't care for any one else in the world. If you let me go I'll want to die."

Then, as he was silent: —

"If you'll marry me, I'll be true to you all my life. I swear it. There will be nobody else, ever."

The sense, if not the words, of what he had sworn to Sidney that Sunday afternoon under the trees, on this very road! Swift shame overtook him, that he

should be here, that he had allowed Carlotta to remain in ignorance of how things really stood between them.

"I'm sorry, Carlotta. It's impossible. I'm engaged to marry some one else."

"Sidney Page?" — almost a whisper.

"Yes."

He was ashamed at the way she took the news. If she had stormed or wept, he would have known what to do. But she sat still, not speaking.

"You must have expected it, sooner or later."

Still she made no reply. He thought she might faint, and looked at her anxiously. Her profile, indistinct beside him, looked white and drawn. But Carlotta was not fainting. She was making a desperate plan. If their escapade became known, it would end things between Sidney and him. She was sure of that. She needed time to think it out. It must become known without any apparent move on her part. If, for instance, she became ill, and was away from the hospital all night, that might answer. The thing would be investigated, and who knew —

The car turned in at Schwitter's road and drew up before the house. The narrow porch was filled with small tables, above which hung rows of electric lights enclosed in Japanese paper lanterns. Midweek, which had found the White Springs Hotel almost deserted, saw Schwitter's crowded tables set out under the trees. Seeing the crowd, Wilson drove directly to the yard and parked his machine.

"No need of running any risk," he explained to the still figure beside him. "We can walk back and take a table under the trees, away from those infernal lanterns."

She reeled a little as he helped her out.

"Not sick, are you?"

"I'm dizzy. I'm all right."

She looked white. He felt a stab of pity for her. She leaned rather heavily on him as they walked toward the house. The faint perfume that had almost intoxicated him, earlier, vaguely irritated him now.

At the rear of the house she shook off his arm and preceded him around the building. She chose the end of the porch as the place in which to drop, and went down like a stone, falling back.

There was a moderate excitement. The visitors at Schwitter's were too much engrossed with themselves to be much interested. She opened her eyes almost as soon as she fell — to forestall any tests; she was shrewd enough to know that Wilson would detect her malingering very quickly — and begged to be taken into the house.

"I feel very ill," she said, and her white face bore her out.

Schwitter and Bill carried her in and up the stairs to one of the newly furnished rooms. The little man was twittering with anxiety. He had a horror of knockout drops and the police. They laid her on the bed, her hat beside her; and Wilson, stripping down the long sleeve of her glove, felt her pulse.

"There's a doctor in the next town," said Schwitter. "I was going to send for him, anyhow — my wife's not very well."

"I'm a doctor."

"Is it anything serious?"

"Nothing serious."

He closed the door behind the relieved figure of the landlord, and, going back to Carlotta, stood looking down at her.

"What did you mean by doing that?"

"Doing what?"

"You were no more faint than I am."

She closed her eyes.

"I don't remember. Everything went black. The lanterns —"

He crossed the room deliberately and went out, closing the door behind him. He saw at once where he stood — in what danger. If she insisted that she was ill and unable to go back, there would be a fuss. The story would come out. Everything would be gone. Schwitter's, of all places!

At the foot of the stairs, Schwitter pulled himself together. After all, the girl was only ill. There was nothing for the police. He looked at his watch. The doctor ought to be here by this time. It was sooner than they had expected. Even the nurse had not come. Tillie was alone, out in the harness-room. He looked through the crowded rooms, at the overflowing porch with its travesty of pleasure, and he hated the whole thing with a desperate hatred.

Another car. Would they never stop coming! But perhaps it was the doctor.

A young man edged his way into the hall and confronted him.

"Two people just arrived here. A man and a woman — in white. Where are they?"

It was trouble then, after all!

"Upstairs — first bedroom to the right." His teeth chattered. Surely, as a man sowed he reaped.

Joe went up the staircase. At the top, on the landing, he confronted Wilson. He fired at him without a word — saw him fling up his arms and fall back, striking first the wall, then the floor.

The buzz of conversation on the porch suddenly ceased. Joe put his revolver in his pocket and went quietly down the stairs. The crowd parted to let him through.

Carlotta, crouched in her room, listening, not daring to open the door, heard the sound of a car as it swung out into the road.

CHAPTER XXV

On the evening of the shooting at Schwitter's, there had been a late operation at the hospital. Sidney, having duly transcribed her lecture notes and said her prayers, was already asleep when she received the insistent summons to the operating-room. She dressed again with flying fingers. These night battles with death roused all her fighting blood. There were times when she felt as if, by sheer will, she could force strength, life itself, into failing bodies. Her sensitive nostrils dilated, her brain worked like a machine.

That night she received well-deserved praise. When the Lamb, telephoning hysterically, had failed to locate the younger Wilson, another staff surgeon was called. His keen eyes watched Sidney — felt her capacity, her fiber, so to speak; and, when everything was over, he told her what was in his mind.

"Don't wear yourself out, girl," he said gravely. "We need people like you. It was good work to-night — fine work. I wish we had more like you."

By midnight the work was done, and the nurse in charge sent Sidney to bed.

It was the Lamb who received the message about Wilson; and because he was not very keen at the

best, and because the news was so startling, he refused to credit his ears.

"Who is this at the 'phone?"

"That does n't matter. Le Moyne 's my name Get the message to Dr. Ed Wilson at once. We are starting to the city."

"Tell me again. I must n't make a mess of this."

"Dr. Wilson, the surgeon, has been shot," came slowly and distinctly. "Get the staff there and have a room ready. Get the operating-room ready, too."

The Lamb wakened then, and roused the house. He was incoherent, rather, so that Dr. Ed got the impression that it was Le Moyne who had been shot, and only learned the truth when he got to the hospital.

"Where is he?" he demanded. He liked K., and his heart was sore within him.

"Not in yet, sir. A Mr. Le Moyne is bringing him. Staff 's in the executive committee room, sir."

"But — who has been shot? I thought you said —"

The Lamb turned pale at that, and braced himself.

"I 'm sorry — I thought you understood. I believe it 's not — not serious. It 's Dr. Max, sir."

Dr. Ed, who was heavy and not very young, sat down on an office chair. Out of sheer habit he had brought the bag. He put it down on the floor beside him, and moistened his lips.

"Is he living?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I gathered that Mr. Le Moyne did not think it serious."

He lied, and Dr. Ed knew he lied.

The Lamb stood by the door, and Dr. Ed sat and waited. The office clock said half after three. Outside the windows, the night world went by — taxicabs full of roisterers, women who walked stealthily close to the buildings, a truck carrying steel, so heavy that it shook the hospital as it rumbled by.

Dr. Ed sat and waited. The bag with the dog-collar in it was on the floor. He thought of many things, but mostly of the promise he had made his mother. And, having forgotten the injured man's shortcomings, he was remembering his good qualities — his cheerfulness, his courage, his achievements. He remembered the day Max had done the Edwardes operation, and how proud he had been of him. He figured out how old he was — not thirty-one yet, and already, perhaps — There he stopped thinking. Cold beads of sweat stood out on his forehead.

"I think I hear them now, sir," said the Lamb, and stood back respectfully to let him pass out of the door.

Carlotta stayed in the room during the consultation. No one seemed to wonder why she was there, or to pay any attention to her. The staff was stricken. They moved back to make room for Dr. Ed beside the bed, and then closed in again.

Carlotta waited, her hand over her mouth to keep

herself from screaming. Surely they would operate; they would n't let him die like that!

When she saw the phalanx break up, and realized that they would not operate, she went mad. She stood against the door, and accused them of cowardice — taunted them.

"Do you think he would let any of you die like that?" she cried. "Die like a hurt dog, and none of you to lift a hand?"

It was Pfeiffer who drew her out of the room and tried to talk reason and sanity to her.

"It's hopeless," he said. "If there was a chance, we'd operate, and you know it."

The staff went hopelessly down the stairs to the smoking-room, and smoked. It was all they could do. The night assistant sent coffee down to them, and they drank it. Dr. Ed stayed in his brother's room, and said to his mother, under his breath, that he'd tried to do his best by Max, and that from now on it would be up to her.

K. had brought the injured man in. The country doctor had come, too, finding Tillie's trial not imminent. On the way in he had taken it for granted that K. was a medical man like himself, and had placed his hypodermic case at his disposal.

When he missed him, — in the smoking-room, that was, — he asked for him.

"I don't see the chap who came in with us," he said. "Clever fellow. Like to know his name."

The staff did not know.

K. sat alone on a bench in the hall. He wondered who would tell Sidney; he hoped they would be very gentle with her. He sat in the shadow, waiting. He did not want to go home and leave her to what she might have to face. There was a chance she would ask for him. He wanted to be near, in that case.

He sat in the shadow, on the bench. The night watchman went by twice and stared at him. At last he asked K. to mind the door until he got some coffee.

"One of the staff's been hurt," he explained. "If I don't get some coffee now, I won't get any."

K. promised to watch the door.

A desperate thing had occurred to Carlotta. Somehow, she had not thought of it before. Now she wondered how she could have failed to think of it. If only she could find him and he would do it! She would go down on her knees — would tell him everything, if only he would consent.

When she found him on his bench, however, she passed him by. She had a terrible fear that he might go away if she put the thing to him first. He clung hard to his new identity.

So first she went to the staff and confronted them. They were men of courage, only declining to undertake what they considered hopeless work. The one man among them who might have done the thing with any chance of success lay stricken. Not one among them but would have given of his best — only his best was not good enough.

"It would be the Edwardes operation, would n't it?" demanded Carlotta.

The staff was bewildered. There were no rules to cover such conduct on the part of a nurse. One of them — Pfeiffer again, by chance — replied rather heavily: —

"If any, it would be the Edwardes operation."

"Would Dr. Edwardes himself be able to do anything?"

This was going a little far.

"Possibly. One chance in a thousand, perhaps. But Edwardes is dead. How did this thing happen, Miss Harrison?"

She ignored his question. Her face was ghastly, save for the trace of rouge; her eyes were red-rimmed.

"Dr. Edwardes is sitting on a bench in the hall outside!" she announced.

Her voice rang out. K. heard her and raised his head. His attitude was weary, resigned. The thing had come, then! He was to take up the old burden. The girl had told.

Dr. Ed had sent for Sidney. Max was still unconscious. Ed remembered about her when, tracing his brother's career from his babyhood to man's estate and to what seemed now to be its ending, he had remembered that Max was very fond of Sidney. He had hoped that Sidney would take him and do for him what he, Ed, had failed to do.

So Sidney was summoned.

She thought it was another operation, and her spirit was just a little weary. But her courage was indomitable. She forced her shoes on her tired feet, and bathed her face in cold water to rouse herself.

The night watchman was in the hall. He was fond of Sidney; she always smiled at him; and, on his morning rounds at six o'clock to waken the nurses, her voice was always amiable. So she found him in the hall, holding a cup of tepid coffee. He was old and bleary, unmistakably dirty too — but he had divined Sidney's romance.

"Coffee! For me?" She was astonished.

"Drink it. You have n't had much sleep."

She took it obediently, but over the cup her eyes searched his.

"There is something wrong, daddy."

That was his name, among the nurses. He had had another name, but it was lost in the mists of years.

"Get it down."

So she finished it, not without anxiety that she might be needed. But daddy's attentions were few, and not to be lightly received.

"Can you stand a piece of bad news?"

Strangely, her first thought was of K.

"There has been an accident. Dr. Wilson —"

"Which one?"

"Dr. Max — has been hurt. It ain't much, but I guess you'd like to know it."

"Where is he?"

"Downstairs, in Seventeen."

So she went down alone to the room where Dr Ed sat in a chair, with his untidy bag beside him on the floor, and his eyes fixed on a straight figure on the bed. When he saw Sidney, he got up and put his arms around her. His eyes told her the truth before he told her anything. She hardly listened to what he said. The fact was all that concerned her — that her lover was dying there, so near that she could touch him with her hand, so far away that no voice, no caress of hers, could reach him.

The why would come later. Now she could only stand, with Dr. Ed's arms about her, and wait.

"If they would only do something!" Sidney's voice sounded strange to her ears.

"There is nothing to do."

But that, it seemed, was wrong. For suddenly Sidney's small world, which had always sedately revolved in one direction, began to move the other way.

The door opened, and the staff came in. But where before they had moved heavily, with drooped heads, now they came quickly, as men with a purpose. There was a tall man in a white coat with them. He ordered them about like children, and they hastened to do his will. At first Sidney only knew that now, at last, they were going to do something — the tall man was going to do something. He stood with his back to Sidney, and gave orders.

The heaviness of inactivity lifted. The room buzzed. The nurses stood by, while the staff did nurses' work. The senior surgical interne, essaying assistance, was shoved aside by the senior surgical consultant, and stood by, aggrieved.

It was the Lamb, after all, who brought the news to Sidney. The new activity had caught Dr. Ed, and she was alone now, her face buried against the back of a chair.

"There'll be something doing now, Miss Page," he offered.

"What are they going to do?"

"Going after the bullet. Do you know who's going to do it?"

His voice echoed the subdued excitement of the room — excitement and new hope.

"Did you ever hear of Edwardes, the surgeon? — the Edwardes operation, you know. Well, he's here. It sounds like a miracle. They found him sitting on a bench in the hall downstairs."

Sidney raised her head, but she could not see the miraculously found Edwardes. She could see the familiar faces of the staff, and that other face on the pillow, and — she gave a little cry. There was K.! How like him to be there, to be wherever any one was in trouble! Tears came to her eyes — the first tears she had shed.

As if her eyes had called him, he looked up and saw her. He came toward her at once. The staff stood back to let him pass, and gazed after him.

The wonder of what had happened was growing on them.

K. stood beside Sidney, and looked down at her. Just at first it seemed as if he found nothing to say. Then: —

"There's just a chance, Sidney dear. Don't count too much on it."

"I have got to count on it. If I don't, I shall die."

If a shadow passed over his face, no one saw it.

"I'll not ask you to go back to your room. If you will wait somewhere near, I'll see that you have immediate word."

"I am going to the operating-room."

"Not to the operating-room. Somewhere near."

His steady voice controlled her hysteria. But she resented it. She was not herself, of course, what with strain and weariness.

"I shall ask Dr. Edwardes."

He was puzzled for a moment. Then he understood. After all, it was as well. Whether she knew him as Le Moyne or as Edwardes mattered very little, after all. The thing that really mattered was that he must try to save Wilson for her. If he failed — It ran through his mind that if he failed she might hate him the rest of her life — not for himself, but for his failure: that, whichever way things went, he must lose.

"Dr. Edwardes says you are to stay away from

the operation, but to remain near. He — he promises to call you if — things go wrong."

She had to be content with that.

Nothing about that night was real to Sidney. She sat in the anæsthetizing-room, and after a time she knew that she was not alone. There was somebody else. She realized dully that Carlotta was there, too, pacing up and down the little room. She was never sure, for instance, whether she imagined it, or whether Carlotta really stopped before her and surveyed her with burning eyes.

"So you thought he was going to marry you!" said Carlotta — or the dream. "Well, you see he is n't."

Sidney tried to answer, and failed — or that was the way the dream went.

"If you had enough character, I'd think you did it. How do I know you did n't follow us, and shoot him as he left the room?"

It must have been reality, after all; for Sidney's numbed mind grasped the essential fact here, and held on to it. He had been out with Carlotta. He had promised — sworn that this should not happen. It had happened. It surprised her. It seemed as if nothing more could hurt her.

In the movement to and from the operating-room, the door stood open for a moment. A tall figure — how much it looked like K.! — straightened and held out something in its hand.

"The bullet!" said Carlotta in a whisper.

Then more waiting, a stir of movement in the room beyond the closed door. Carlotta was standing, her face buried in her hands, against the door. Sidney suddenly felt sorry for her. She cared a great deal. It must be tragic to care like that! She herself was not caring much; she was too numb.

Beyond, across the courtyard, was the stable. Before the day of the motor ambulances, horses had waited there for their summons, eager as fire horses, heads lifted to the gong. When Sidney saw the outline of the stable roof, she knew that it was dawn. The city still slept, but the torturing night was over. And in the gray dawn the staff, looking gray too, and elderly and weary, came out through the closed door and took their hushed way toward the elevator. They were talking among themselves. Sidney, straining her ears, gathered that they had seen a miracle, and that the wonder was still on them.

Carlotta followed them out.

Almost on their heels came K. He was in the white coat, and more and more he looked like the man who had raised up from his work and held out something in his hand. Sidney's head was aching and confused.

She sat there in her chair, looking small and childish. The dawn was morning now — horizontal rays of sunlight on the stable roof and across the window-sill of the anæsthetizing-room, where a row of bottles sat on a clean towel.

The tall man — or was it K.? — looked at her, and then reached up and turned off the electric light. Why, it was K., of course; and he was putting out the hall light before he went upstairs. When the light was out everything was gray. She could not see. She slid very quietly out of her chair, and lay at his feet in a dead faint.

K. carried her to the elevator. He held her as he had held her that day at the park when she fell in the river, very carefully, tenderly, as one holds something infinitely precious. Not until he had placed her on her bed did she open her eyes. But she was conscious before that. She was so tired, and to be carried like that, in strong arms, not knowing where one was going, or caring —

The nurse he had summoned hustled out for aromatic ammonia. Sidney, lying among her pillows, looked up at K.

"How is he?"

"A little better. There's a chance, dear."

"I have been so mixed up. All the time I was sitting waiting, I kept thinking that it was you who were operating! Will he really get well?"

"It looks promising."

"I should like to thank Dr. Edwardes."

The nurse was a long time getting the ammonia. There was so much to talk about: that Dr. Max had been out with Carlotta Harrison, and had been shot by a jealous woman; the inexplicable return to life of the great Edwardes; and — a fact the nurse her-

self was willing to vouch for, and that thrilled the training-school to the core — that this very Edwardes, newly risen, as it were, and being a miracle himself as well as performing one, this very Edwardes, carrying Sidney to her bed and putting her down, had stealthily kissed her on her white forehead.

The training-school doubted this. How could he know Sidney Page? And, after all, the nurse had only seen it in the mirror, being occupied at the time in seeing if her cap was straight. The school, therefore, accepted the miracle, but refused the kiss.

The miracle was no miracle, of course. But something had happened to K. that savored of the marvelous. His faith in himself was coming back — not strongly, with a rush, but with all humility. He had been loath to take up the burden; but, now that he had it, he breathed a sort of inarticulate prayer to be able to carry it.

And, since men have looked for signs since the beginning of time, he too asked for a sign. Not, of course, that he put it that way, or that he was making terms with Providence. It was like this: if Wilson got well, he'd keep on working. He'd feel that, perhaps, after all, this was meant. If Wilson died —

Sidney held out her hand to him.

"What should I do without you, K.?" she asked wistfully.

"All you have to do is to want me."

His voice was not too steady, and he took her pulse in a most businesslike way to distract her attention from it.

"How very many things you know! You are quite professional about pulses."

Even then he did not tell her. He was not sure, to be frank, that she'd be interested. Now, with Wilson as he was, was no time to obtrude his own story. There was time enough for that.

"Will you drink some beef tea if I send it to you?"

"I'm not hungry. I will, of course."

"And — will you try to sleep?"

"Sleep, while he —"

"I promise to tell you if there is any change. I shall stay with him."

"I'll try to sleep."

But, as he rose from the chair beside her low bed, she put out her hand to him.

"K."

"Yes, dear."

"He was out with Carlotta. He promised, and he broke his promise."

"There may have been reasons. Suppose we wait until he can explain."

"How can he explain?" And, when he hesitated: "I bring all my troubles to you, as if you had none. Somehow, I can't go to Aunt Harriet, and of course mother — Carlotta cares a great deal for him. She said that I shot him. Does any one really think that?"

"Of course not. Please stop thinking."

"But who did, K.? He had so many friends, and no enemies that I knew of."

Her mind seemed to stagger about in a circle, making little excursions, but always coming back to the one thing.

"Some drunken visitor to the road-house."

He could have killed himself for the words the moment they were spoken.

"They were at a road-house?"

"It is not just to judge any one before you hear the story."

She stirred restlessly.

"What time is it?"

"Half-past six."

"I must get up and go on duty."

He was glad to be stern with her. He forbade her rising. When the nurse came in with the belated ammonia, she found K. making an arbitrary ruling, and Sidney looking up at him mutinously.

"Miss Page is not to go on duty to-day. She is to stay in bed until further orders."

"Very well, Dr. Edwardes."

The confusion in Sidney's mind cleared away suddenly. K. was Dr. Edwardes! It was K. who had performed the miracle operation — K. who had dared and perhaps won! Dear K., with his steady eyes and his long surgeon's fingers! Then, because she seemed to see ahead as well as back into the past in that flash that comes to the drowning and to those

recovering from shock, and because she knew that now the little house would no longer be home to K., she turned her face into her pillow and cried. Her world had fallen indeed. Her lover was not true and might be dying; her friend would go away to his own world, which was not the Street.

K. left her at last and went back to Seventeen, where Dr. Ed still sat by the bed. Inaction was telling on him. If Max would only open his eyes, so he could tell him what had been in his mind all these years — his pride in him and all that.

With a sort of belated desire to make up for where he had failed, he put the bag that had been Max's *bête noir* on the bedside table, and began to clear it of rubbish — odd bits of dirty cotton, the tubing from a long defunct stethoscope, glass from a broken bottle, a scrap of paper on which was a memorandum, in his illegible writing, to send Max a check for his graduating suit. When K. came in, he had the old dog-collar in his hand.

"Belonged to an old collie of ours," he said heavily. "Milkman ran over him and killed him. Max chased the wagon and licked the driver with his own whip."

His face worked.

"Poor old Bobby Burns!" he said. "We'd raised him from a pup. Got him in a grape-basket."

The sick man opened his eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI

MAX had rallied well, and things looked bright for him. His patient did not need him, but K. was anxious to find Joe; so he telephoned the gas office and got a day off. The sordid little tragedy was easy to reconstruct, except that, like Joe, K. did not believe in the innocence of the excursion to Schwitter's. His spirit was heavy with the conviction that he had saved Wilson to make Sidney ultimately wretched.

For the present, at least, K.'s revealed identity was safe. Hospitals keep their secrets well. And it is doubtful if the Street would have been greatly concerned even had it known. It had never heard of Edwardes, of the Edwardes clinic or the Edwardes operation. Its medical knowledge comprised the two Wilsons and the osteopath around the corner. When, as would happen soon, it learned of Max Wilson's injury, it would be more concerned with his chances of recovery than with the manner of it. That was as it should be.

But Joe's affair with Sidney had been the talk of the neighborhood. If the boy disappeared, a scandal would be inevitable. Twenty people had seen him at Schwitter's and would know him again.

To save Joe, then, was K.'s first care.

At first it seemed as if the boy had frustrated him.

He had not been home all night. Christine, waylaying K. in the little hall, told him that.

"Mrs. Drummond was here," she said. "She is almost frantic. She says Joe has not been home all night. She says he looks up to you, and she thought if you could find him and would talk to him —"

"Joe was with me last night. We had supper at the White Springs Hotel. Tell Mrs. Drummond he was in good spirits, and that she's not to worry. I feel sure she will hear from him to-day. Something went wrong with his car, perhaps, after he left me."

He bathed and shaved hurriedly. Katie brought his coffee to his room, and he drank it standing. He was working out a theory about the boy. Beyond Schwitter's the highroad stretched, broad and inviting, across the State. Either he would have gone that way, his little car eating up the miles all that night, or — K. would not formulate his fear of what might have happened, even to himself.

As he went down the Street, he saw Mrs. McKee in her doorway, with a little knot of people around her. The Street was getting the night's news.

He rented a car at a local garage, and drove himself out into the country. He was not minded to have any eyes on him that day. He went to Schwitter's first. Schwitter himself was not in sight. Bill was scrubbing the porch, and a farmhand was gathering bottles from the grass into a box. The dead lanterns swung in the morning air, and from back

on the hill came the staccato sounds of a reaping-machine.

"Where's Schwitter?"

"At the barn with the missus. Got a boy back there."

Bill grinned. He recognized K., and, mopping dry a part of the porch, shoved a chair on it.

"Sit down. Well, how's the man who got his last night? Dead?"

"No."

"County detectives were here bright and early. After the lady's husband. I guess we lose our license over this."

"What does Schwitter say?"

"Oh, him!" Bill's tone was full of disgust. "He hopes we do. He hates the place. Only man I ever knew that hated money. That's what this house is — money."

"Bill, did you see the man who fired that shot last night?"

A sort of haze came over Bill's face, as if he had dropped a curtain before his eyes. But his reply came promptly: —

"Surest thing in the world. Close to him as you are to me. Dark man, about thirty, small mustache —"

"Bill, you're lying, and I know it. Where is he?"

The barkeeper kept his head, but his color changed.

"I don't know anything about him." He thrust his mop into the pail. K. rose.

"Does Schwitter know?"

"He does n't know nothing. He 's been out at the barn all night."

The farmhand had filled his box and disappeared around the corner of the house. K. put his hand on Bill's shirt-sleeved arm.

"We 've got to get him away from here, Bill."

"Get who away?"

"You know. The county men may come back to search the premises."

"How do I know you are n't one of them?"

"I guess you know I 'm not. He 's a friend of mine. As a matter of fact, I followed him here; but I was too late. Did he take the revolver away with him?"

"I took it from him. It 's under the bar."

"Get it for me."

In sheer relief, K.'s spirits rose. After all, it was a good world: Tillie with her baby in her arms; Wilson conscious and rallying; Joe safe, and, without the revolver, secure from his own remorse. Other things there were, too — the feel of Sidney's inert body in his arms, the way she had turned to him in trouble. It was not what he wanted, this last, but it was worth while. The reaping-machine was in sight now; it had stopped on the hillside. The men were drinking out of a bucket that flashed in the sun.

There was one thing wrong. What had come over Wilson, to do so reckless a thing? K., who was a one-woman man, could not explain it.

From inside the bar Bill took a careful survey of

Le Moyne. He noted his tall figure and shabby suit, the slight stoop, the hair graying over his ears. Barkeepers know men: that's a part of the job. After his survey he went behind the bar and got the revolver from under an overturned pail.

K. thrust it into his pocket.

"Now," he said quietly, "where is he?"

"In my room — top of the house."

K. followed Bill up the stairs. He remembered the day when he had sat waiting in the parlor, and had heard Tillie's slow step coming down. And last night he himself had carried down Wilson's unconscious figure. Surely the wages of sin were wretchedness and misery. None of it paid. No one got away with it.

The room under the eaves was stifling. An unmade bed stood in a corner. From nails in the rafters hung Bill's holiday wardrobe. A tin cup and a cracked pitcher of spring water stood on the window-sill.

Joe was sitting in the corner farthest from the window. When the door swung open, he looked up. He showed no interest on seeing K., who had to stoop to enter the low room.

"Hello, Joe."

"I thought you were the police."

"Not much. Open that window, Bill. This place is stifling."

"Is he dead?"

"No, indeed."

"I wish I'd killed him!"

"Oh, no, you don't. You're damned glad you did n't, and so am I."

"What will they do with me?"

"Nothing until they find you. I came to talk about that. They'd better not find you."

"Huh!"

"It's easier than it sounds."

K. sat down on the bed.

"If I only had some money!" he said. "But never mind about that, Joe; I'll get some."

Loud calls from below took Bill out of the room. As he closed the door behind him, K.'s voice took on a new tone: —

"Joe, why did you do it?"

"You know."

"You saw him with somebody at the White Springs, and followed them?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who was with him?"

"Yes, and so do you. Don't go into that. I did it, and I'll stand by it."

"Has it occurred to you that you made a mistake?"

"Go and tell that to somebody who'll believe you!" he sneered. "They came here and took a room. I met him coming out of it. I'd do it again if I had a chance, and do it better."

"It was not Sidney."

"Aw, chuck it!"

"It's a fact. I got here not two minutes after you left. The girl was still there. It was some one else. Sidney was not out of the hospital last night. She attended a lecture, and then an operation."

Joe listened. It was undoubtedly a relief to him to know that it had not been Sidney; but if K. expected any remorse, he did not get it.

"If he is that sort, he deserves what he got," said the boy grimly.

And K. had no reply. But Joe was glad to talk. The hours he had spent alone in the little room had been very bitter, and preceded by a time that he shuddered to remember. K. got it by degrees — his descent of the staircase, leaving Wilson lying on the landing above; his mad excursion into the darkness, until his gasolene gave out; his resolve to walk back and surrender himself at Schwitter's, so that there could be no mistake as to who had committed the crime.

"I intended to write a confession and then shoot myself," he told K. "But the barkeeper got my gun out of my pocket. And —"

After a pause: "Does she know who did it?"

"Sidney? No."

"Then, if he gets better, she'll marry him anyhow."

"Possibly. That's not up to us, Joe. The thing we've got to do is to hush the thing up, and get you away."

"I'd go to Cuba, but I have n't the money."

K. rose. "I think I can get it."

He turned in the doorway.

"Sidney need never know who did it."

"I'm not ashamed of it." But his face showed relief.

There are times when some cataclysm tears down the walls of reserve between men. That time had come for Joe, and to a lesser extent for K. The boy rose and followed him to the door.

"Why don't you tell her the whole thing? — the whole filthy story?" he asked. "She'd never look at him again. You're crazy about her. I have n't got a chance. It would give you one."

"I want her, God knows!" said K. "But not that way, boy."

Schwitter had taken in five hundred dollars the previous day.

"Five hundred gross," the little man hastened to explain. "But you're right, Mr. Le Moyne. And I guess it would please *her*. It's going hard with her, just now, that she has n't any women friends about. It's in the safe, in cash; I have n't had time to take it to the bank." He seemed to apologize to himself for the unbusinesslike proceeding of lending an entire day's gross receipts on no security. "It's better to get him away, of course. It's good business. I have tried to have an orderly place. If they arrest him here —"

His voice trailed off. He had come a far way from the day he had walked down the Street and eyed

its poplars with appraising eyes — a far way. Now he had a son, and the child's mother looked at him with tragic eyes. It was arranged that K. should go back to town, returning late that night to pick up Joe at a lonely point on the road, and to drive him to a railroad station. But, as it happened, he went back that afternoon.

He had told Schwitter he would be at the hospital, and the message found him there. Wilson was holding his own, conscious now and making a hard fight. The message from Schwitter was very brief: —

"Something has happened, and Tillie wants you. I don't like to trouble you again, but she — wants you."

K. was rather gray of face by that time, having had no sleep and little food since the day before. But he got into the rented machine again — its rental was running up; he tried to forget it — and turned it toward Hillfoot. But first of all he drove back to the Street, and walked without ringing into Mrs. McKee's.

Neither a year's time nor Mrs. McKee's approaching change of state had altered the "mealing" house. The ticket-punch still lay on the hat-rack in the hall. Through the rusty screen of the back parlor window one viewed the spiræa, still in need of spraying. Mrs. McKee herself was in the pantry, placing one slice of tomato and three small lettuce leaves on each of an interminable succession of plates.

K., who was privileged, walked back.

"I've got a car at the door," he announced. "and there's nothing so extravagant as an empty seat in an automobile. Will you take a ride?"

Mrs. McKee agreed. Being of the class who believe a boudoir cap the ideal headdress for a motor-car, she apologized for having none.

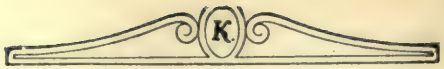
"If I'd known you were coming I would have borrowed a cap," she said. "Miss Tripp, third floor front, has a nice one. If you'll take me in my toque—"

K. said he'd take her in her toque, and waited with some anxiety, having not the faintest idea what a toque was. He was not without other anxieties. What if the sight of Tillie's baby did not do all that he expected? Good women could be most cruel. And Schwitter had been very vague. But here K. was more sure of himself: the little man's voice had expressed as exactly as words the sense of a bereavement that was not a grief.

He was counting on Mrs. McKee's old fondness for the girl to bring them together. But, as they neared the house with its lanterns and tables, its whitewashed stones outlining the drive, its small upper window behind which Joe was waiting for night, his heart failed him, rather. He had a masculine dislike for meddling, and yet— Mrs. McKee had suddenly seen the name in the wooden arch over the gate: "Schwitter's."

"I'm not going in there, Mr. Le Moyne."

"Tillie's not in the house. She's back in the barn."



"In the barn!"

"She did n't approve of all that went on there, so she moved out. It's very comfortable and clean; it smells of hay. You'd be surprised how nice it is."

"The like of her!" snorted Mrs. McKee. "She's late with her conscience, I'm thinking."

"Last night," K. remarked, hands on the wheel, but car stopped, "she had a child there. It — it's rather like very old times, is n't it? A man-child, Mrs. McKee, not in a manger, of course."

"What do you want me to do?" Mrs. McKee's tone, which had been fierce at the beginning, ended feebly.

"I want you to go in and visit her, as you would any woman who'd had a new baby and needed a friend. Lie a little —" Mrs. McKee gasped. "Tell her the baby's pretty. Tell her you've been wanting to see her." His tone was suddenly stern. "Lie a little, for your soul's sake."

She wavered, and while she wavered he drove her in under the arch with the shameful name, and back to the barn. But there he had the tact to remain in the car, and Mrs. McKee's peace with Tillie was made alone. When, five minutes later, she beckoned him from the door of the barn, her eyes were red.

"Come in, Mr. K.," she said. "The wife's dead, poor thing. They're going to be married right away."

The clergyman was coming along the path with

Schwitter at his heels. K. entered the barn. At the door to Tillie's room he uncovered his head The child was asleep at her breast.

The five thousand dollar check from Mr. Lorenz had saved Palmer Howe's credit. On the strength of the deposit, he borrowed a thousand at the bank with which he meant to pay his bills, arrears at the University and Country Clubs, a hundred dollars lost throwing aces with poker dice, and various small obligations of Christine's.

The immediate result of the money was good. He drank nothing for a week, went into the details of the new venture with Christine's father, sat at home with Christine on her balcony in the evenings. With the knowledge that he could pay his debts, he postponed the day. He liked the feeling of a bank account in four figures.

The first evening or two Christine's pleasure in having him there gratified him. He felt kind, magnanimous, almost virtuous. On the third evening he was restless. It occurred to him that his wife was beginning to take his presence as a matter of course. He wanted cold bottled beer. When he found that the ice was out and the beer warm and flat, he was furious.

Christine had been making a fight, although her heart was only half in it. She was resolutely good-humored, ignored the past, dressed for Palmer in the things he liked. They still took their dinners

at the Lorenz house up the street. When she saw that the haphazard table service there irritated him, she coaxed her mother into getting a butler.

The Street sniffed at the butler behind his stately back. Secretly and in its heart, it was proud of him. With a half-dozen automobiles, and Christine Howe putting on low neck in the evenings, and now a butler, not to mention Harriet Kennedy's Mimi, it ceased to pride itself on its commonplaceness, ignorant of the fact that in its very lack of affectation had lain its charm.

On the night that Joe shot Max Wilson, Palmer was noticeably restless. He had seen Grace Irving that day for the first time but once since the motor accident. To do him justice, his dissipation of the past few months had not included women.

The girl had a strange fascination for him. Perhaps she typified the care-free days before his marriage; perhaps the attraction was deeper, fundamental. He met her in the street the day before Max Wilson was shot. The sight of her walking sedately along in her shop-girl's black dress had been enough to set his pulses racing. When he saw that she meant to pass him, he fell into step beside her.

"I believe you were going to cut me!"

"I was in a hurry."

"Still in the store?"

"Yes." And, after a second's hesitation: "I'm keeping straight, too."

"How are you getting along?"

"Pretty well. I've had my salary raised."

"Do you have to walk as fast as this?"

"I said I was in a hurry. Once a week I get off a little early. I — "

He eyed her suspiciously.

"Early! What for?"

"I go to the hospital. The Rosenfeld boy is still there, you know."

"Oh!"

But a moment later he burst out irritably: —

"That was an accident, Grace. The boy took the chance when he engaged to drive the car. I'm sorry, of course. I dream of the little devil sometimes, lying there. I'll tell you what I'll do," he added magnanimously. "I'll stop in and talk to Wilson. He ought to have done something before this."

"The boy's not strong enough yet. I don't think you can do anything for him, unless — "

The monstrous injustice of the thing overcame her. Palmer and she walking about, and the boy lying on his hot bed! She choked.

"Well?"

"He worries about his mother. If you could give her some money, it would help."

"Money! Good Heavens — I owe everybody."

"You owe him too, don't you? He'll never walk again."

"I can't give them ten dollars. I don't see that I'm under any obligation, anyhow. I paid his board for two months in the hospital."

When she did not acknowledge this generosity, — amounting to forty-eight dollars, — his irritation grew. Her silence was an accusation. Her manner galled him, into the bargain. She was too calm in his presence, too cold. Where she had once palpitated visibly under his warm gaze, she was now self-possessed and quiet. Where it had pleased his pride to think that he had given her up, he found that the shoe was on the other foot.

At the entrance to a side street she stopped.

"I turn off here."

"May I come and see you sometime?"

"No, please."

"That's flat, is it?"

"It is, Palmer."

He swung around savagely and left her.

The next day he drew the thousand dollars from the bank. A good many of his debts he wanted to pay in cash; there was no use putting checks through, with incriminating indorsements. Also, he liked the idea of carrying a roll of money around. The big fellows at the clubs always had a wad and peeled off bills like skin off an onion. He took a couple of drinks to celebrate his approaching immunity from debt.

He played auction bridge that afternoon in a private room at one of the hotels with the three men he had lunched with. Luck seemed to be with him. He won eighty dollars, and thrust it loose in his trousers pocket. Money seemed to bring money!

If he could carry the thousand around for a day or so, something pretty good might come of it.

He had been drinking a little all afternoon. When the game was over, he bought drinks to celebrate his victory. The losers treated, too, to show they were no pikers. Palmer was in high spirits. He offered to put up the eighty and throw for it. The losers mentioned dinner and various engagements.

Palmer did not want to go home. Christine would greet him with raised eyebrows. They would eat a stuffy Lorenz dinner, and in the evening Christine would sit in the lamplight and drive him mad with soft music. He wanted lights, noise, the smiles of women. Luck was with him, and he wanted to be happy.

At nine o'clock that night he found Grace. She had moved to a cheap apartment which she shared with two other girls from the store. The others were out. It was his lucky day, surely.

His drunkenness was of the mind, mostly. His muscles were well controlled. The lines from his nose to the corners of his mouth were slightly accentuated, his eyes open a trifle wider than usual. That and a slight paleness of the nostrils were the only evidences of his condition. But Grace knew the signs.

"You can't come in."

"Of course I'm coming in."

She retreated before him, her eyes watchful. Men in his condition were apt to be as quick with a blow

as with a caress. But, having gained his point, he was amiable.

"Get your things on and come out. We can take in a roof-garden."

"I've told you I'm not doing that sort of thing."

He was ugly in a flash.

"You've got somebody else on the string."

"Honestly, no. There — there has never been anybody else, Palmer."

He caught her suddenly and jerked her toward him.

"You let me hear of anybody else, and I'll cut the guts out of him!"

He held her for a second, his face black and fierce. Then, slowly and inevitably, he drew her into his arms. He was drunk, and she knew it. But, in the queer loyalty of her class, he was the only man she had cared for. She cared now. She took him for that moment, felt his hot kisses on her mouth, her throat, submitted while his rather brutal hands bruised her arms in fierce caresses. Then she put him from her resolutely.

"Now you're going."

"The hell I'm going!"

But he was less steady than he had been. The heat of the little flat brought more blood to his head. He wavered as he stood just inside the door.

"You must go back to your wife."

"She does n't want me. She's in love with a fellow at the house."

"Palmer, hush!"

"Lemme come in and sit down, won't you?"

She let him pass her into the sitting-room. He dropped into a chair.

"You've turned me down, and now Christine — she thinks I don't know. I'm no fool; I see a lot of things. I'm no good. I know that I've made her miserable. But I made a merry little hell for you too, and you don't kick about it."

"You know that."

She was watching him gravely. She had never seen him just like this. Nothing else, perhaps, could have shown her so well what a broken reed he was.

"I got you in wrong. You were a good girl before I knew you. You're a good girl now. I'm not going to do you any harm, I swear it. I only wanted to take you out for a good time. I've got money. Look here!"

He drew out the roll of bills and showed it to her. Her eyes opened wide. She had never known him to have much money.

"Lots more where that comes from."

A new look flashed into her eyes, not cupidity, but purpose.

She was instantly cunning.

"Are n't you going to give me some of that?"

"What for?"

"I — I want some clothes."

The very drunk have the intuition sometimes of savages or brute beasts.

"You lie."

"I want it for Johnny Rosenfeld."

He thrust it back into his pocket, but his hand retained its grasp of it.

"That's it," he complained. "Don't lemme be happy for a minute! Throw it all up to me!"

"You give me that for the Rosenfeld boy, and I'll go out with you."

"If I give you all that, I won't have any money to go out with!"

But his eyes were wavering. She could see victory.

"Take off enough for the evening."

But he drew himself up.

"I'm no piker," he said largely. "Whole hog or nothing. Take it."

He held it out to her, and from another pocket produced the eighty dollars, in crushed and wrinkled notes.

"It's my lucky day," he said thickly. "Plenty more where this came from. Do anything for you. Give it to the little devil. I —" He yawned. "God, this place is hot!"

His head dropped back on his chair; he propped his sagging legs on a stool. She knew him — knew that he would sleep almost all night. She would have to make up something to tell the other girls; but no matter — she could attend to that later.

She had never had a thousand dollars in her hands before. It seemed smaller than that amount. Perhaps he had lied to her. She paused, in pinning on her hat, to count the bills. It was all there.

CHAPTER XXVII

K. SPENT all of the evening of that day with Wilson. He was not to go for Joe until eleven o'clock. The injured man's vitality was standing him in good stead. He had asked for Sidney and she was at his bedside. Dr. Ed had gone.

"I'm going, Max. The office is full, they tell me," he said, bending over the bed. "I'll come in later, and if they'll make me a shakedown, I'll stay with you to-night."

The answer was faint, broken but distinct. "Get some sleep . . . I've been a poor stick . . . try to do better — " His roving eyes fell on the dog collar on the stand. He smiled, "Good old Bob!" he said, and put his hand over Dr. Ed's, as it lay on the bed.

K. found Sidney in the room, not sitting, but standing by the window. The sick man was dozing. One shaded light burned in a far corner. She turned slowly and met his eyes. It seemed to K. that she looked at him as if she had never really seen him before, and he was right. Readjustments are always difficult.

Sidney was trying to reconcile the K. she had known so well with this new K., no longer obscure, although still shabby, whose height had suddenly become presence, whose quiet was the quiet of infinite power.

She was suddenly shy of him, as he stood looking down at her. He saw the gleam of her engagement ring on her finger. It seemed almost defiant. As though she had meant by wearing it to emphasize her belief in her lover.

They did not speak beyond their greeting, until he had gone over the record. Then: —

"We can't talk here. I want to talk to you, K."

He led the way into the corridor. It was very dim. Far away was the night nurse's desk, with its lamp, its annunciator, its pile of records. The passage floor reflected the light on glistening boards.

"I have been thinking until I am almost crazy, K. And now I know how it happened. It was Joe."

"The principal thing is, not how it happened, but that he is going to get well, Sidney."

She stood looking down, twisting her ring around her finger.

"Is Joe in any danger?"

"We are going to get him away to-night. He wants to go to Cuba. He'll get off safely, I think."

"*We* are going to get him away! *You* are, you mean. You shoulder all our troubles, K., as if they were your own."

"I?" He was genuinely surprised. "Oh, I see. You mean — but my part in getting Joe off is practically nothing. As a matter of fact, Schwitter has put up the money. My total capital in the world, after paying the taxicab to-day, is seven dollars."

"The taxicab?"

"By Jove, I was forgetting! Best news you ever heard of! Tillie married and has a baby — all in twenty-four hours! Boy — they named it Le Moyne. Squalled like a maniac when the water went on its head. I — I took Mrs. McKee out in a hired machine. That's what happened to my capital." He grinned sheepishly. "She said she would have to go in her toque. I had awful qualms. I thought it was a wrapper."

"You, of course," she said. "You find Max and save him — don't look like that! You did, did n't you? And you get Joe away, borrowing money to send him. And as if that is n't enough, when you ought to have been getting some sleep, you are out taking a friend to Tillie, and being godfather to the baby."

He looked uncomfortable, almost guilty.

"I had a day off. I —"

"When I look back and remember how all these months I've been talking about service, and you said nothing at all, and all the time you were living what I preached — I'm so ashamed, K."

He would not allow that. It distressed him. She saw that, and tried to smile.

"When does Joe go?"

"To-night. I'm to take him across the country to the railroad. I was wondering —"

"Yes?"

"I'd better explain first what happened, and why

it happened. Then if you are willing to send him a line, I think it would help. He saw a girl in white in the car and followed in his own machine. He thought it was you, of course. He did n't like the idea of your going to Schwitter's. Carlotta was taken ill. And Schwitter and — and Wilson took her upstairs to a room."

"Do you believe that, K.?"

"I do. He saw Max coming out and misunderstood. He fired at him then."

"He did it for me. I feel very guilty, K., as if it all comes back to me. I'll write to him, of course. Poor Joe!"

He watched her go down the hall toward the night nurse's desk. He would have given everything just then for the right to call her back, to take her in his arms and comfort her. She seemed so alone. He himself had gone through loneliness and heartache, and the shadow was still on him. He waited until he saw her sit down at the desk and take up a pen. Then he went back into the quiet room.

He stood by the bedside, looking down. Wilson was breathing quietly: his color was coming up, as he rallied from the shock. In K.'s mind now was just one thought — to bring him through for Sidney, and then to go away. He might follow Joe to Cuba. There were chances there. He could do sanitation work, or he might try the Canal.

The Street would go on working out its own sal-

vation. He would have to think of something for the Rosenfelds. And he was worried about Christine. But there again, perhaps it would be better if he went away. Christine's story would have to work itself out. His hands were tied.

He was glad in a way that Sidney had asked no questions about him, had accepted his new identity so calmly. It had been overshadowed by the night tragedy. It would have pleased him if she had shown more interest, of course. But he understood. It was enough, he told himself, that he had helped her, that she counted on him. But more and more he knew in his heart that it was not enough. "I'd better get away from here," he told himself savagely.

And having taken the first step toward flight, as happens in such cases, he was suddenly panicky with fear, fear that he would get out of hand, and take her in his arms, whether or no; a temptation to run from temptation, to cut everything and go with Joe that night. But there his sense of humor saved him. That would be a sight for the gods, two defeated lovers flying together under the soft September moon.

Some one entered the room. He thought it was Sidney and turned with the light in his eyes that was only for her. It was Carlotta.

She was not in uniform. She wore a dark skirt and white waist and her high heels tapped as she crossed the room. She came directly to him.

"He is better, is n't he?"

"He is rallying. Of course it will be a day or two before we are quite sure."

She stood looking down at Wilson's quiet figure.

"I guess you know I've been crazy about him," she said quietly. "Well, that's all over. He never really cared for me. I played his game and I — lost. I've been expelled from the school."

Quite suddenly she dropped on her knees beside the bed, and put her cheek close to the sleeping man's hand. When after a moment she rose, she was controlled again, calm, very white.

"Will you tell him, Dr. Edwardes, when he is conscious, that I came in and said good-bye?"

"I will, of course. Do you want to leave any other message?"

She hesitated, as if the thought tempted her. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"What would be the use? He doesn't want any message from me."

She turned toward the door. But K. could not let her go like that. Her face frightened him. It was too calm, too controlled. He followed her across the room.

"What are your plans?"

"I haven't any. I'm about through with my training, but I've lost my diploma."

"I don't like to see you going away like this."

She avoided his eyes, but his kindly tone did what neither the Head nor the Executive Committee had done that day. It shook her control.

"What does it matter to you? You don't owe me anything."

"Perhaps not. One way and another I've known you a long time."

"You never knew anything very good."

"I'll tell you where I live, and —"

"I know where you live."

"Will you come to see me there? We may be able to think of something."

"What is there to think of? This story will follow me wherever I go! I've tried twice for a diploma and failed. What's the use?"

But in the end he prevailed on her to promise not to leave the city until she had seen him again. It was not until she had gone, a straight figure with haunted eyes, that he reflected whimsically that once again he had defeated his own plans for flight.

In the corridor outside the door Carlotta hesitated. Why not go back? Why not tell him? He was kind; he was going to do something for her. But the old instinct of self-preservation prevailed. She went on to her room.

Sidney brought her letter to Joe back to K. She was flushed with the effort and with a new excitement.

"This is the letter, K., and — I have n't been able to say what I wanted, exactly. You'll let him know, won't you, how I feel, and how I blame myself?"

K. promised gravely.

"And the most remarkable thing has happened. What a day this has been! Somebody has sent Johnny Rosenfeld a lot of money. The ward nurse wants you to come back."

The ward had settled for the night. The well-ordered beds of the daytime were chaotic now, torn apart by tossing figures. The night was hot and an electric fan hummed in a far corner. Under its sporadic breezes, as it turned, the ward was trying to sleep.

Johnny Rosenfeld was not asleep. An incredible thing had happened to him. A fortune lay under his pillow. He was sure it was there, for ever since it came his hot hand had clutched it.

He was quite sure that somehow or other K. had had a hand in it. When he disclaimed it, the boy was bewildered.

"It'll buy the old lady what she wants for the house, anyhow," he said. "But I hope nobody's took up a collection for me. I don't want no charity."

"Maybe Mr. Howe sent it."

"You can bet your last match he did n't."

In some unknown way the news had reached the ward that Johnny's friend, Mr. Le Moyne, was a great surgeon. Johnny had rejected it scornfully.

"He works in the gas office," he said. "I've seen him there. If he's a surgeon, what's he doing in the gas office. If he's a surgeon, what's he doing teaching me raffia-work? Why is n't he on his job?"

But the story had seized on his imagination.

"Say, Mr. Le Moyne."

"Yes, Jack."

He called him "Jack." The boy liked it. It savored of man to man. After all, he was a man, or almost. Had n't he driven a car? Did n't he have a state license?

"They've got a queer story about you here in the ward."

"Not scandal, I trust, Jack!"

"They say that you're a surgeon; that you operated on Dr. Wilson and saved his life. They say that you're the king pin where you came from." He eyed K. wistfully. "I know it's a damn lie, but if it's true —"

"I used to be a surgeon. As a matter of fact I operated on Dr. Wilson to-day. I — I am rather apologetic, Jack, because I did n't explain to you sooner. For — various reasons — I gave up that — that line of business. To-day they rather forced my hand."

"Don't you think you could do something for me, sir?"

When K. did not reply at once, he launched into an explanation.

"I've been lying here a good while. I did n't say much because I knew I'd have to take a chance. Either I'd pull through or I would n't, and the odds were — well, I did n't say much. The old lady's had a lot of trouble. But now, with *this* under my

pillow for her, I've got a right to ask. I'll take a chance, if you will."

"It's only a chance, Jack."

"I know that. But lie here and watch these soaks off the street. Old, a lot of them, and gettin' well to go out and starve, and — My God! Mr. Le Moyne, they can walk, and I can't."

K. drew a long breath. He had started, and now he must go on. Faith in himself or no faith, he must go on. Life, that had loosed its hold on him for a time, had found him again.

"I'll go over you carefully to-morrow, Jack. I'll tell you your chances honestly."

"I have a thousand dollars. Whatever you charge —"

"I'll take it out of my board bill in the new house!"

At four o'clock that morning K. got back from seeing Joe off. The trip had been without accident.

Over Sidney's letter Joe had shed a shamefaced tear or two. And during the night ride, with K. pushing the car to the utmost, he had felt that the boy, in keeping his hand in his pocket, had kept it on the letter. When the road was smooth and stretched ahead, a gray-white line into the night, he tried to talk a little courage into the boy's sick heart.

"You'll see new people, new life," he said. "In a month from now you'll wonder why you ever hung around the Street. I have a feeling that you're going to make good down there."

And once, when the time for parting was very near, —

"No matter what happens, keep on believing in yourself. I lost my faith in myself once. It was pretty close to hell.

Joe's response showed his entire self-engrossment.

"If he dies, I'm a murderer."

"He's not going to die," said K. stoutly.

At four o'clock in the morning he left the car at the garage and walked around to the little house. He had had no sleep for forty-five hours; his eyes were sunken in his head; the skin over his temples looked drawn and white. His clothes were wrinkled; the soft hat he habitually wore was white with the dust of the road.

As he opened the hall door, Christine stirred in the room beyond. She came out fully dressed.

"K., are you sick?"

"Rather tired. Why in the world are n't you in bed?"

"Palmer has just come home in a terrible rage He says he's been robbed of a thousand dollars."

"Where?"

Christine shrugged her shoulders.

"He does n't know, or says he does n't. I'm glad of it. He seems thoroughly frightened. It may be a lesson."

In the dim hall light he realized that her face was strained and set. She looked on the verge of hysteria.

"Poor little woman," he said. "I'm sorry, Christine."

The tender words broke down the last barrier of her self-control.

"Oh, K.! Take me away. Take me away! I can't stand it any longer."

She held her arms out to him, and because he was very tired and lonely, and because more than anything else in the world just then he needed a woman's arms, he drew her to him and held her close, his cheek to her hair.

"Poor girl!" he said. "Poor Christine! Surely there must be some happiness for us somewhere."

But the next moment he let her go and stepped back.

"I'm sorry." Characteristically he took the blame. "I should n't have done that — You know how it is with me."

"Will it always be Sidney?"

"I'm afraid it will always be Sidney."

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHNNY ROSENFELD was dead. All of K.'s skill had not sufficed to save him. The operation had been a marvel, but the boy's long-sapped strength failed at the last.

K., set of face, stayed with him to the end. The boy did not know he was going. He roused from the coma and smiled up at Le Moyne.

"I've got a hunch that I can move my right foot," he said. "Look and see."

K. lifted the light covering.

"You're right, old man. It's moving."

"Brake foot, clutch foot," said Johnny, and closed his eyes again.

K. had forbidden the white screens, that outward symbol of death. Time enough for them later. So the ward had no suspicion, nor had the boy.

The ward passed in review. It was Sunday, and from the chapel far below came the faint singing of a hymn. When Johnny spoke again he did not open his eyes.

"You're some operator, Mr. Le Moyne. I'll put in a word for you whenever I get a chance."

"Yes, put in a word for me," said K. huskily.

He felt that Johnny would be a good mediator — that whatever he, K., had done of omission or com-

mission, Johnny's voice before the Tribunal would count.

The lame young violin-player came into the ward. She had cherished a secret and romantic affection for Max Wilson, and now he was in the hospital and ill. So she wore the sacrificial air of a young nun and played "The Holy City."

Johnny was close on the edge of his long sleep by that time, and very comfortable.

"Tell her nix on the sob stuff," he complained. "Ask her to play 'I'm twenty-one and she's eighteen.'"

She was rather outraged, but on K.'s quick explanation she changed to the staccato air.

"Ask her if she'll come a little nearer; I can't hear her."

So she moved to the foot of the bed, and to the gay little tune Johnny began his long sleep. But first he asked K. a question: —

"Are you sure I'm going to walk, Mr. Le Moyne?"

"I give you my solemn word," said K. huskily, "that you are going to be better than you have ever been in your life."

It was K. who, seeing he would no longer notice, ordered the screens to be set around the bed, K. who drew the coverings smooth and folded the boy's hands over his breast.

The violin-player stood by uncertainly.

"How very young he is! Was it an accident?"

"It was the result of a man's damnable folly," said K. grimly. "Somebody always pays."

And so Johnny Rosenfeld paid.

The immediate result of his death was that K., who had gained some of his faith in himself on seeing Wilson on the way to recovery, was beset by his old doubts. What right had he to arrogate to himself again powers of life and death? Over and over he told himself that there had been no carelessness here, that the boy would have died ultimately, that he had taken the only chance, that the boy himself had known the risk and begged for it.

The old doubts came back.

And now came a question that demanded immediate answer. Wilson would be out of commission for several months, probably. He was gaining, but slowly. And he wanted K. to take over his work.

"Why not?" he demanded, half irritably. "The secret is out. Everybody knows who you are. You're not thinking about going back to that ridiculous gas office, are you?"

"I had some thought of going to Cuba."

"I'm damned if I understand you. You've done a marvelous thing; I lie here and listen to the staff singing your praises until I'm sick of your name! And now, because a boy who would n't have lived anyhow —"

"That's not it," K. put in hastily. "I know all that. I guess I could do it and get away with it as well as the average. All that deters me — I've never told you, have I, why I gave up before?"

Wilson was propped up in his bed. K. was walk-

ing restlessly about the room, as was his habit when troubled.

"I've heard the gossip; that's all."

"When you recognized me that night on the balcony, I told you I'd lost my faith in myself, and you said the whole affair had been gone over at the State Society. As a matter of fact, the Society knew of only two cases. There had been three."

"Even at that —"

"You know what I always felt about the profession, Max. We went into that more than once in Berlin. Either one's best or nothing. I had done pretty well. When I left Lorch and built my own hospital, I had n't a doubt of myself. And because I was getting results I got a lot of advertising. Men began coming to the clinics. I found I was making enough out of the patients who could pay to add a few free wards. I want to tell you now, Wilson, that the opening of those free wards was the greatest self-indulgence I ever permitted myself. I'd seen so much careless attention given the poor — well, never mind that. It was almost three years ago that things began to go wrong. I lost a big case."

"I know. All this does n't influence me, Edwardes."

"Wait a moment. We had a system in the operating-room as perfect as I could devise it. I never finished an operation without having my first assistant verify the clip and sponge count. But that first case died because a sponge had been left in the

operating field. You know how those things go; you can't always see them, and one goes by the count, after reasonable caution. Then I almost lost another case in the same way — a free case.

"As well as I could tell, the precautions had not been relaxed. I was doing from four to six cases a day. After the second one I almost went crazy. I made up my mind, if there was ever another, I'd give up and go away."

"There was another?"

"Not for several months. When the last case died, a free case again, I performed my own autopsy. I allowed only my first assistant in the room. He was almost as frenzied as I was. It was the same thing again. When I told him I was going away, he offered to take the blame himself, to say he had closed the incision. He tried to make me think he was responsible. I knew — better."

"It's incredible."

"Exactly; but it's true. The last patient was a laborer. He left a family. I've sent them money from time to time. I used to sit and think about the children he left, and what would become of them The ironic part of it was that, for all that had happened, I was busier all the time. Men were sending me cases from all over the country. It was either stay and keep on working, with that chance, or — quit. I quit."

"But if you had stayed, and taken extra precautions —"

"We'd taken every precaution we knew."

Neither of the men spoke for a time. K. stood, his tall figure outlined against the window. Far off, in the children's ward, children were laughing; from near by a very young baby wailed a thin cry of protest against life; a bell rang constantly. K.'s mind was busy with the past — with the day he decided to give up and go away, with the months of wandering and homelessness, with the night he had come up the Street and had seen Sidney on the doorstep of the little house.

"That's the worst, is it?" Max Wilson demanded at last.

"That's enough."

"It's extremely significant. You had an enemy somewhere — on your staff, probably. This profession of ours is a big one, but you know its jealousies. Let a man get his shoulders above the crowd, and the pack is after him." He laughed a little. "Mixed figure, but you know what I mean."

K. shook his head. He had had that gift of the big man everywhere, in every profession, of securing the loyalty of his followers. He would have trusted every one of them with his life.

"You're going to do it, of course."

"Take up your work?"

"Yes."

He stirred restlessly. To stay on, to be near Sidney, perhaps to stand by as Wilson's best man when she was married — it turned him cold. But he did

not give a decided negative. The sick man was flushed and growing fretful; it would not do to irritate him.

"Give me another day on it," he said at last. And so the matter stood.

Max's injury had been productive of good, in one way. It had brought the two brothers closer together. In the mornings Max was restless until Dr. Ed arrived. When he came, he brought books in the shabby bag — his beloved Burns, although he needed no book for that, the "Pickwick Papers," Renan's "Lives of the Disciples." Very often Max would doze off; but at the cessation of Dr. Ed's sonorous voice the sick man would stir fretfully and demand more. But because he listened to everything without discrimination, the older man came to the conclusion that it was the companionship that counted. It pleased him vastly. It reminded him of Max's boyhood, when he had read to Max at night. For once in the last dozen years. he needed him.

"Go on, Ed. What in blazes makes you stop every five minutes?" Max protested, one day.

Dr. Ed, who had only stopped to bite off the end of a stogie to hold in his cheek, picked up his book in a hurry, and eyed the invalid over it.

"Stop bullying. I'll read when I'm ready. Have you any idea what I'm reading?"

"Of course."

"Well, I have n't. For ten minutes I've been reading across both pages!"

Max laughed, and suddenly put out his hand. Demonstrations of affection were so rare with him that for a moment Dr. Ed was puzzled. Then, rather sheepishly, he took it.

"When I get out," Max said, "we'll have to go out to the White Springs again and have supper."

That was all; but Ed understood.

Morning and evening, Sidney went to Max's room. In the morning she only smiled at him from the doorway. In the evening she went to him after prayers. She was allowed an hour with him then.

The shooting had been a closed book between them. At first, when he began to recover, he tried to talk to her about it. But she refused to listen. She was very gentle with him, but very firm.

"I know how it happened, Max," she said — "about Joe's mistake and all that. The rest can wait until you are much better."

If there had been any change in her manner to him, he would not have submitted so easily, probably. But she was as tender as ever, unfailingly patient, prompt to come to him and slow to leave. After a time he began to dread reopening the subject. She seemed so effectually to have closed it. Carlotta was gone. And, after all, what good could he do his cause by pleading it? The fact was there, and Sidney knew it.

On the day when K. had told Max his reason for giving up his work, Max was allowed out of bed for the first time. It was a great day. A box of red roses

came that day from the girl who had refused him a year or more ago. He viewed them with a carelessness that was half assumed.

The news had traveled to the Street that he was to get up that day. Early that morning the doorkeeper had opened the door to a gentleman who did not speak, but who handed in a bunch of early chrysanthemums and proceeded to write, on a pad he drew from his pocket: —

"From Mrs. McKee's family and guests, with their congratulations on your recovery, and their hope that they will see you again soon. If their ends are clipped every day and they are placed in ammonia water, they will last indefinitely."

Sidney spent her hour with Max that evening as usual. His big chair had been drawn close to a window, and she found him there, looking out. She kissed him. But this time, instead of letting her draw away, he put out his arms and caught her to him.

"Are you glad?"

"Very glad, indeed," she said soberly.

"Then smile at me. You don't smile any more. You ought to smile; your mouth —"

"I am almost always tired; that's all, Max."

She eyed him bravely.

"Are n't you going to let me make love to you at all? You get away beyond my reach."

"I was looking for the paper to read to you."

A sudden suspicion flamed in his eyes.

"Sidney."

"Yes, dear."

"You don't like me to touch you any more. Come here where I can see you."

The fear of agitating him brought her quickly. For a moment he was appeased.

"That's more like it. How lovely you are, Sidney!" He lifted first one hand and then the other to his lips. "Are you ever going to forgive me?"

"If you mean about Carlotta, I forgave that long ago."

He was almost boyishly relieved. What a wonder she was! So lovely, and so sane. Many a woman would have held that over him for years — not that he had done anything really wrong on that nightmare excursion. But so many women are exigent about promises.

"When are you going to marry me?"

"We need n't discuss that to-night, Max."

"I want you so very much. I don't want to wait, dear. Let me tell Ed that you will marry me soon. Then, when I go away, I'll take you with me."

"Can't we talk things over when you are stronger?"

Her tone caught his attention, and turned him a little white. He faced her to the window, so that the light fell full on her.

"What things? What do you mean?"

He had forced her hand. She had meant to wait; but, with his keen eyes on her, she could not dissemble.

"I am going to make you very unhappy for a little while."

"Well?"

"I've had a lot of time to think. If you had really wanted me, Max —"

"My God, of course I want you!"

"It is n't that I am angry. I am not even jealous. I was at first. It is n't that. It's hard to make you understand. I think you care for me —"

"I love you! I swear I never loved any other woman as I love you."

Suddenly he remembered that he had also sworn to put Carlotta out of his life. He knew that Sidney remembered, too; but she gave no sign.

"Perhaps that's true. You might go on caring for me. Sometimes I think you would. But there would always be other women, Max. You're like that. Perhaps you can't help it."

"If you loved me you could do anything with me." He was half sullen.

By the way her color leaped, he knew he had struck fire. All his conjectures as to how Sidney would take the knowledge of his entanglement with Carlotta had been founded on one major premise — that she loved him. The mere suspicion made him gasp.

"But, good Heavens, Sidney, you do care for me, don't you?"

"I'm afraid I don't, Max; not enough."

She tried to explain, rather pitifully. After one look at his face, she spoke to the window.

"I'm so wretched about it. I thought I cared. To me you were the best and greatest man that ever lived. I — when I said my prayers, I — But that does n't matter. You were a sort of god to me. When the Lamb — that's one of the internes, you know — nicknamed you the 'Little Tin God,' I was angry. You could never be anything little to me, or do anything that was n't big. Do you see?"

He groaned under his breath.

"No man could live up to that, Sidney."

"No. I see that now. But that's the way I cared. Now I know that I did n't care for you, really, at all. I built up an idol and worshiped it. I always saw you through a sort of haze. You were operating, with everybody standing by, saying how wonderful it was. Or you were coming to the wards, and everything was excitement, getting ready for you. I blame myself terribly. But you see, don't you? It is n't that I think you are wicked. It's just that I never loved the real you, because I never knew you."

When he remained silent, she made an attempt to justify herself.

"I'd known very few men," she said. "I came into the hospital, and for a time life seemed very terrible. There were wickednesses I had never heard of, and somebody always paying for them. I was always asking, Why? Why? Then you would come in, and a lot of them you cured and sent out. You gave them their chance, don't you see? Until

I knew about Carlotta, you always meant that to me. You were like K. — always helping."

The room was very silent. In the nurses' parlor, a few feet down the corridor, the nurses were at prayers.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," read the Head, her voice calm with the quiet of twilight and the end of the day.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

The nurses read the response a little slowly, as if they, too, were weary: —

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death —"

The man in the chair stirred. He had come through the valley of the shadow, and for what? He was very bitter. He said to himself savagely that they would better have let him die.

"You say you never loved me because you never knew me. I'm not a rotter, Sidney. Is n't it possible that the man you cared about, who — who did his best by people and all that — is the real me?"

She gazed at him thoughtfully. He missed something out of her eyes, the sort of luminous, wistful look with which she had been wont to survey his greatness. Measured by this new glance, so clear, so appraising, he shrank back into his chair.

"The man who did his best is quite real. You have always done your best in your work; you always will. But the other is a part of you too,

Max. Even if I cared, I would not dare to run the risk."

Under the window rang the sharp gong of a city patrol-wagon. It rumbled through the gates back to the courtyard, where its continued clamor summoned white-coated orderlies.

An operating-room case, probably. Sidney, chin lifted, listened carefully. If it was a case for her, the elevator would go up to the operating-room. With a renewed sense of loss, Max saw that already she had put him out of her mind. The call to service was to her a call to battle. Her sensitive nostrils quivered; her young figure stood erect, alert.

"It has gone up!"

She took a step toward the door, hesitated, came back, and put a light hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, dear Max."

She had kissed him lightly on the cheek before he knew what she intended to do. So passionless was the little caress that, perhaps more than anything else, it typified the change in their relation.

When the door closed behind her, he saw that she had left her ring on the arm of his chair. He picked it up. It was still warm from her finger. He held it to his lips with a quick gesture. In all his successful young life he had never before felt the bitterness of failure. The very warmth of the little ring hurt.

Why had n't they let him die? He did n't want to live — he would n't live. Nobody cared for him! He would —

His eyes, lifted from the ring, fell on the red glow of the roses that had come that morning. Even in the half light, they glowed with fiery color.

The ring was in his right hand. With the left he settled his collar and soft silk tie.

K. saw Carlotta that evening for the last time. Katie brought word to him, where he was helping Harriet close her trunk, — she was on her way to Europe for the fall styles, — that he was wanted in the lower hall.

"A lady!" she said, closing the door behind her by way of caution. "And a good thing for her she's not from the alley. The way those people beg off you is a sin and a shame, and it's not at home you're going to be to them from now on."

So K. had put on his coat and, without so much as a glance in Harriet's mirror, had gone down the stairs. Carlotta was in the lower hall. She stood under the chandelier, and he saw at once the ravages that trouble had made in her. She was a dead white, and she looked ten years older than her age.

"I came, you see, Dr. Edwardes."

Now and then, when some one came to him for help, which was generally money, he used Christine's parlor, if she happened to be out. So now, finding the door ajar, and the room dark, he went in and turned on the light.

"Come in here; we can talk better."

She did not sit down at first; but, observing that her standing kept him on his feet, she sat finally. Evidently she found it hard to speak.

"You were to come," K. encouraged her, "to see if we could n't plan something for you. Now, I think I've got it."

"If it's another hospital — and I don't want to stay here, in the city."

"You like surgical work, don't you?"

"I don't care for anything else."

"Before we settle this, I'd better tell you what I'm thinking of. You know, of course, that I closed my hospital. I — a series of things happened, and I decided I was in the wrong business. That would n't be important, except for what it leads to. They are trying to persuade me to go back, and — I'm trying to persuade myself that I'm fit to go back. You see," — his tone was determinedly cheerful, — "my faith in myself has been pretty nearly gone. When one loses that, there is n't much left."

"You had been very successful." She did not look up.

"Well, I had and I had n't. I'm not going to worry you about that. My offer is this: We'll just try to forget about — about Schwitter's and all the rest, and if I go back I'll take you on in the operating-room."

"You sent me away once!"

"Well, I can ask you to come back, can't I?" He smiled at her encouragingly.

"Are you sure you understand about Max Wilson and myself?"

"I understand."

"Don't you think you are taking a risk?"

"Every one makes mistakes now and then, and loving women have made mistakes since the world began. Most people live in glass houses, Miss Harrison. And don't make any mistake about this: people can always come back. No depth is too low. All they need is the will power."

He smiled down at her. She had come armed with confession. But the offer he made was too alluring. It meant reinstatement, another chance, when she had thought everything was over. After all, why should she damn herself? She would go back. She would work her finger-ends off for him. She would make it up to him in other ways. But she could not tell him and lose everything.

"Come," he said. "Shall we go back and start over again?"

He held out his hand.

CHAPTER XXIX

LATE September had come, with the Street, after its summer indolence taking up the burden of the year. At eight-thirty and at one the school bell called the children. Little girls in pig-tails, carrying freshly sharpened pencils, went primly toward the school, gathering, comet fashion, a tail of unwilling brothers as they went.

An occasional football hurtled through the air. Le Moyne had promised the baseball club a football outfit, rumor said, but would not coach them himself this year. A story was going about that Mr. Le Moyne intended to go away.

The Street had been furiously busy for a month. The cobblestones had gone, and from curb to curb stretched smooth asphalt. The fascination of writing on it with chalk still obsessed the children. Every few yards was a hop-scotch diagram. Generally speaking, too, the Street had put up new curtains, and even, here and there, had added a coat of paint.

To this general excitement the strange case of Mr. Le Moyne had added its quota. One day he was in the gas office, making out statements that were absolutely ridiculous. (What with no baking all last month, and every Sunday spent in the country, nobody could have used that amount of gas. They

could come and take their old meter out!) And the next there was the news that Mr. Le Moyne had been only taking a holiday in the gas office, — paying off old scores, the barytone at Mrs. McKee's hazarded! — and that he was really a very great surgeon and had saved Dr. Max Wilson.

The Street, which was busy at the time deciding whether to leave the old sidewalks or to put down cement ones, had one evening of mad excitement over the matter, — of K., not the sidewalks, — and then had accepted the new situation.

But over the news of K.'s approaching departure it mourned. What was the matter with things, anyhow? Here was Christine's marriage, which had promised so well, — awnings and palms and everything, — turning out badly. True, Palmer Howe was doing better, but he would break out again. And Johnny Rosenfeld was dead, so that his mother came on washing-days, and brought no cheery gossip, but bent over her tubs dry-eyed and silent — even the approaching move to a larger house failed to thrill her. There was Tillie, too. But one did not speak of her. She was married now, of course; but the Street did not tolerate such a reversal of the usual processes as Tillie had indulged in. It censured Mrs. McKee severely for having been, so to speak, an accessory after the fact.

The Street made a resolve to keep K., if possible. If he had shown any "high and mightiness," as they

called it, since the change in his estate, it would have let him go without protest. But when a man is the real thing, — so that the newspapers give a column to his having been in the city almost two years, — and still goes about in the same shabby clothes, with the same friendly greeting for every one, it demonstrates clearly, as the barytone put it, that "he's got no swelled head on him; that's sure."

"Anybody can see by the way he drives that machine of Wilson's that he's been used to a car — likely a foreign one. All the swells have foreign cars." Still the barytone, who was almost as fond of conversation as of what he termed "vocal." "And another thing. Do you notice the way he takes Dr. Ed around? Has him at every consultation. The old boy's tickled to death."

A little later, K., coming up the Street as he had that first day, heard the barytone singing: —

> "Home is the hunter, home from the hill,
> And the sailor, home from sea."

Home! Why, this *was* home. The Street seemed to stretch out its arms to him. The ailanthus tree waved in the sunlight before the little house. Tree and house were old; September had touched them. Christine sat sewing on the balcony. A boy with a piece of chalk was writing something on the new cement under the tree. He stood back, head on one side, when he had finished, and inspected his work. K. caught him up from behind, and, swinging him around —

"Hey!" he said severely. "Don't you know better than to write all over the street? What'll I do to you? Give you to a policeman?"

"Aw, lemme down, Mr. K."

"You tell the boys that if I find this street scrawled over any more, the picnic's off."

"Aw, Mr. K.!"

"I mean it. Go and spend some of that chalk energy of yours in school."

He put the boy down. There was a certain tenderness in his hands, as in his voice, when he dealt with children. All his severity did not conceal it.

"Get along with you, Bill. Last bell's rung."

As the boy ran off, K.'s eye fell on what he had written on the cement. At a certain part of his career, the child of such a neighborhood as the Street "cancels" names. It is a part of his birthright. He does it as he whittles his school desk or tries to smoke the long dried fruit of the Indian cigar tree. So K. read in chalk on the smooth street: —

Max Wilson Marriage.
Sidney Page Love.

The childish scrawl stared up at him impudently, a sacred thing profaned by the day. K. stood and looked at it. The barytone was still singing; but now it was "I'm twenty-one, and she's eighteen." It was a cheerful air, as should be the air that had accompanied Johnny Rosenfeld to his long sleep. The light was gone from K.'s face again. After all, the Street meant for him not so much home as it meant

Sidney. And now, before very long, that book of his life, like others, would have to be closed.

He turned and went heavily into the little house.

Christine called to him from her little balcony: —

"I thought I heard your step outside. Have you time to come out?"

K. went through the parlor and stood in the long window. His steady eyes looked down at her.

"I see very little of you now," she complained. And, when he did not reply immediately: "Have you made any definite plans, K.?"

"I shall do Max's work until he is able to take hold again. After that —"

"You will go away?"

"I think so. I am getting a good many letters, one way and another. I suppose, now I'm back in harness, I'll stay. My old place is closed. I'd go back there — they want me. But it seems so futile, Christine, to leave as I did, because I felt that I had no right to go on as things were; and now to crawl back on the strength of having had my hand forced, and to take up things again, not knowing that I've a bit more right to do it than when I left!"

"I went to see Max yesterday. You know what he thinks about all that."

He took an uneasy turn up and down the balcony.

"But who?" he demanded. "Who would do such a thing? I tell you, Christine, it is n't possible."

She did not pursue the subject. Her thoughts had flown ahead to the little house without K., to days without his steps on the stairs or the heavy creak of his big chair overhead as he dropped into it.

But perhaps it would be better if he went. She had her own life to live. She had no expectation of happiness, but, somehow or other, she must build on the shaky foundation of her marriage a house of life, with resignation serving for content, perhaps with fear lurking always. That she knew. But with no active misery. Misery implied affection, and her love for Palmer was quite dead.

"Sidney will be here this afternoon."

"Good." His tone was non-committal.

"Has it occurred to you, K., that Sidney is not very happy?"

He stopped in front of her.

"She's had a great anxiety."

"She has no anxiety now. Max is doing well."

"Then what is it?"

"I'm not quite sure, but I think I know. She's lost faith in Max, and she's not like me. I — I knew about Palmer before I married him. I got a letter. It's all rather hideous — I need n't go into it. I was afraid to back out; it was just before my wedding. But Sidney has more character than I have. Max is n't what she thought he was, and I doubt whether she'll marry him."

K. glanced toward the street where Sidney's name and Max's lay open to the sun and to the smiles of

the Street. Christine might be right, but that did not alter things for him.

Christine's thoughts went back inevitably to herself; to Palmer, who was doing better just now; to K., who was going away — went back with an ache to the night K. had taken her in his arms and then put her away. How wrong things were! What a mess life was!

"When you go away," she said at last, "I want you to remember this. I'm going to do my best, K. You have taught me all I know. All my life I'll have to overlook things; I know that. But, in his way, Palmer cares for me. He will always come back, and perhaps sometime —"

Her voice trailed off. Far ahead of her she saw the years stretching out, marked, not by days and months, but by Palmer's wanderings away, his remorseful returns.

"Do a little more than forgetting," K. said. "Try to care for him, Christine. You did once. And that's your strongest weapon. It's always a woman's strongest weapon. And it wins in the end."

"I shall try, K.," she answered obediently.

But he turned away from the look in her eyes.

Harriet was abroad. She had sent cards from Paris to her "trade." It was an innovation. The two or three people on the Street who received her engraved announcement that she was there, "buying new *chic* models for the autumn and winter — afternoon frocks, evening gowns, reception dresses,

and wraps, from Poiret, Martial et Armand, and others," left the envelopes casually on the parlor table, as if communications from Paris were quite to be expected.

So K. lunched alone, and ate little. After luncheon he fixed a broken ironing-stand for Katie, and in return she pressed a pair of trousers for him. He had it in mind to ask Sidney to go out with him in Max's car, and his most presentable suit was very shabby.

"I'm thinking," said Katie, when she brought the pressed garments up over her arm and passed them in through a discreet crack in the door, "that these pants will stand more walking than sitting, Mr. K. They're getting mighty thin."

"I'll take a duster along in case of accident," he promised her; "and to-morrow I'll order a suit, Katie."

"I'll believe it when I see it," said Katie from the stairs. "Some fool of a woman from the alley will come in to-night and tell you she can't pay her rent, and she'll take your suit away in her pocket-book — as like as not to pay an installment on a piano. There's two new pianos in the alley since you came here."

"I promise it, Katie."

"Show it to me," said Katie laconically. "And don't go to picking up anything you drop!"

Sidney came home at half-past two — came delicately flushed, as if she had hurried, and with a tremulous smile that caught Katie's eye at once.

"Bless the child!" she said. "There's no need to ask how he is to-day. You're all one smile."

The smile set just a trifle.

"Katie, some one has written my name out on the street, in chalk. It's with Dr. Wilson's, and it looks so silly. Please go out and sweep it off."

"I'm about crazy with their old chalk. I'll do it after a while."

"Please do it now. I don't want any one to see it. Is — is Mr. K. upstairs?"

But when she learned that K. was upstairs, oddly enough, she did not go up at once. She stood in the lower hall and listened. Yes, he was there. She could hear him moving about. Her lips parted slightly as she listened.

Christine, looking in from her balcony, saw her there, and, seeing something in her face that she had never suspected, put her hand to her throat.

"Sidney!"

"Oh — hello, Chris."

"Won't you come and sit with me?"

"I have n't much time — that is, I want to speak to K."

"You can see him when he comes down."

Sidney came slowly through the parlor. It occurred to her, all at once, that Christine must see a lot of K., especially now. No doubt he was in and out of the house often. And how pretty Christine was! She was unhappy, too. All that seemed to be

necessary to win K.'s attention was to be unhappy enough. Well, surely, in that case —

"How is Max?"

"Still better."

Sidney sat down on the edge of the railing; but she was careful, Christine saw, to face the staircase. There was silence on the balcony. Christine sewed; Sidney sat and swung her feet idly.

"Dr. Ed says Max wants you to give up your training and marry him now."

"I'm not going to marry him at all, Chris."

Upstairs, K.'s door slammed. It was one of his failings that he always slammed doors. Harriet used to be quite disagreeable about it.

Sidney slid from the railing.

"There he is now."

Perhaps, in all her frivolous, selfish life, Christine had never had a bigger moment than the one that followed. She could have said nothing, and, in the queer way that life goes, K. might have gone away from the Street as empty of heart as he had come to it.

"Be very good to him, Sidney," she said unsteadily. "He cares so much."

CHAPTER XXX

K. was being very dense. For so long had he considered Sidney as unattainable that now his masculine mind, a little weary with much wretchedness, refused to move from its old attitude.

"It was glamour, that was all, K.," said Sidney bravely.

"But, perhaps," said K., "it's just because of that miserable incident with Carlotta. That was n't the right thing, of course, but Max has told me the story. It was really quite innocent. She fainted in the yard, and —"

Sidney was exasperated.

"Do you want me to marry him, K.?"

K. looked straight ahead.

"I want you to be happy, dear."

They were on the terrace of the White Springs Hotel again. K. had ordered dinner, making a great to-do about getting the dishes they both liked. But now that it was there, they were not eating. K. had placed his chair so that his profile was turned toward her. He had worn the duster religiously until nightfall, and then had discarded it. It hung limp and dejected on the back of his chair. Past K.'s profile Sidney could see the magnolia tree shaped like a heart.

"It seems to me," said Sidney suddenly, "that you are kind to every one but me, K."

He fairly stammered his astonishment: —

"Why, what on earth have I done?"

"You are trying to make me marry Max, are n't you?"

She was very properly ashamed of that, and, when he failed of reply out of sheer inability to think of one that would not say too much, she went hastily to something else: —

"It is hard for me to realize that you — that you lived a life of your own, a busy life, doing useful things, before you came to us. I wish you would tell me something about yourself. If we're to be friends when you go away," — she had to stop there, for the lump in her throat, — "I'll want to know how to think of you, — who your friends are, — all that."

He made an effort. He was thinking, of course, that he would be visualizing her, in the hospital, in the little house on its side street, as she looked just then, her eyes like stars, her lips just parted, her hands folded before her on the table.

"I shall be working," he said at last. "So will you."

"Does that mean you won't have time to think of me?"

"I'm afraid I'm stupider than usual to-night. You can think of me as never forgetting you or the Street, working or playing."

Playing! Of course he would not work all the time. And he was going back to his old friends, to people who had always known him, to girls —

He did his best then. He told her of the old family house, built by one of his forebears who had been a king's man until Washington had put the case for the colonies, and who had given himself and his oldest son then to the cause that he made his own. He told of old servants who had wept when he decided to close the house and go away. When she fell silent, he thought he was interesting her. He told her the family traditions that had been the fairy tales of his childhood. He described the library, the choice room of the house, full of family paintings in old gilt frames, and of his father's collection of books. Because it was home, he waxed warm over it at last, although it had rather hurt him at first to remember. It brought back the other things that he wanted to forget.

But a terrible thing was happening to Sidney. Side by side with the wonders he described so casually, she was placing the little house. What an exile it must have been for him! How hopelessly middle-class they must have seemed! How idiotic of her to think, for one moment, that she could ever belong in this new-old life of his!

What traditions had she? None, of course, save to be honest and good and to do her best for the people around her. Her mother's people, the Kennedys went back a long way, but they had always been

poor. A library full of paintings and books! She remembered the lamp with the blue-silk shade, the figure of Eve that used to stand behind the minister's portrait, and the cherry bookcase with the Encyclopædia in it and "Beacon Lights of History." When K., trying his best to interest her and to conceal his own heaviness of spirit, told her of his grandfather's old carriage, she sat back in the shadow.

"Fearful old thing," said K., — "regular cabriolet. I can remember yet the family rows over it. But the old gentleman liked it — used to have it repainted every year. Strangers in the city used to turn around and stare at it — thought it was advertising something!"

"When I was a child," said Sidney quietly, "and a carriage drove up and stopped on the Street, I always knew some one had died!"

There was a strained note in her voice. K., whose ear was attuned to every note in her voice, looked at her quickly.

"My great-grandfather," said Sidney in the same tone, "sold chickens at market. He did n't do it himself; but the fact's there, is n't it?"

K. was puzzled.

"What about it?" he said.

But Sidney's agile mind had already traveled on. This K. she had never known, who had lived in a wonderful house, and all the rest of it — he must have known numbers of lovely women, his own sort of women, who had traveled and knew all kinds of

things: girls like the daughters of the Executive Committee, who came in from their country places in summer with great armfuls of flowers, and hurried off, after consulting their jeweled watches, to luncheon or tea or tennis.

"Go on," said Sidney dully. "Tell me about the women you have known, your friends, the ones you liked and the ones who liked you."

K. was rather apologetic.

"I've always been so busy," he confessed. "I know a lot, but I don't think they would interest you. They don't do anything, you know — they travel around and have a good time. They're rather nice to look at, some of them. But when you've said that you've said it all."

Nice to look at! Of course they would be, with nothing else to think of in all the world but of how they looked.

Suddenly Sidney felt very tired. She wanted to go back to the hospital, and turn the key in the door of her little room, and lie with her face down on the bed.

"Would you mind very much if I asked you to take me back?"

He did mind. He had a depressed feeling that the evening had failed. And his depression grew as he brought the car around. He understood, he thought. She was grieving about Max. After all, a girl could n't care as she had for a year and a half, and then give a man up because of another woman, without a wrench.

"Do you really want to go home, Sidney, or were you tired of sitting there? In that case, we could drive around for an hour or two. I'll not talk if you'd like to be quiet."

Being with K. had become an agony, now that she realized how wrong Christine had been, and that their worlds, hers and K.'s, had only touched for a time. Soon they would be separated by as wide a gulf as that which lay between the cherry bookcase — for instance, — and a book-lined library hung with family portraits. But she was not disposed to skimp as to agony. She would go through with it, every word a stab, if only she might sit beside K. a little longer, might feel the touch of his old gray coat against her arm.

"I'd like to ride, if you don't mind."

K. turned the automobile toward the country roads. He was remembering acutely that other ride after Joe in his small car, the trouble he had had to get a machine, the fear of he knew not what ahead, and his arrival at last at the road-house, to find Max lying at the head of the stairs and Carlotta on her knees beside him.

"K."

"Yes?"

"Was there anybody you cared about, — any girl, — when you left home?"

"I was not in love with any one, if that's what you mean."

"You knew Max before, did n't you?"

"Yes. You know that."

"If you knew things about him that I should have known, why did n't you tell me?"

"I could n't do that, could I? Anyhow —"

"Yes?"

"I thought everything would be all right. It seemed to me that the mere fact of your caring for him —" That was shaky ground; he got off it quickly. "Schwitter has closed up. Do you want to stop there?"

"Not to-night, please."

They were near the white house now. Schwitter's had closed up, indeed. The sign over the entrance was gone. The lanterns had been taken down, and in the dusk they could see Tillie rocking her baby on the porch. As if to cover the last traces of his late infamy, Schwitter himself was watering the worn places on the lawn with the garden can.

The car went by. Above the low hum of the engine they could hear Tillie's voice, flat and unmusical, but filled with the harmonies of love as she sang to the child.

When they had left the house far behind, K. was suddenly aware that Sidney was crying. She sat with her head turned away, using her handkerchief stealthily. He drew the car up beside the road, and in a masterful fashion turned her shoulders about until she faced him.

"Now, tell me about it," he said.

"It's just silliness. I'm — I'm a little bit lonely."

"Lonely!"

"Aunt Harriet's in Paris, and with Joe gone and everybody —"

"Aunt Harriet!"

He was properly dazed, for sure. If she had said she was lonely because the cherry bookcase was in Paris, he could not have been more bewildered. And Joe!

"And with you going away and never coming back —"

"I'll come back, of course. How's this? I'll promise to come back when you graduate, and send you flowers."

"I think," said Sidney, "that I'll become an army nurse."

"I hope you won't do that."

"You won't know, K. You'll be back with your old friends. You'll have forgotten the Street and all of us."

"Do you really think that?"

"Girls who have been everywhere, and have lovely clothes, and who won't know a T bandage from a figure eight!"

"There will never be anybody in the world like you to me, dear."

His voice was husky.

"You are saying that to comfort me."

"To comfort you! I — who have wanted you so long that it hurts even to think about it! Ever since the night I came up the Street, and you were sitting

there on the steps — oh, my dear, my dear, if you only cared a little!"

Because he was afraid that he would get out of hand and take her in his arms, — which would be idiotic, since, of course, she did not care for him that way, — he gripped the steering-wheel. It gave him a curious appearance of making a pathetic appeal to the wind-shield.

"I have been trying to make you say that all evening!" said Sidney. "I love you so much that — K., won't you take me in your arms?"

Take her in his arms! He almost crushed her. He held her to him and muttered incoherencies until she gasped. It was as if he must make up for long arrears of hopelessness. He held her off a bit to look at her, as if to be sure it was she and no changeling, and as if he wanted her eyes to corroborate her lips. There was no lack of confession in her eyes; they showed him a new heaven and a new earth.

"It was you always, K.," she confessed. "I just did n't realize it. But now, when you look back, don't you see it was?"

He looked back over the months when she had seemed as unattainable as the stars, and he did not see it. He shook his head.

"I never had even a hope."

"Not when I came to you with everything? I brought you all my troubles, and you always helped."

Her eyes filled. She bent down and kissed one of

his hands. He was so happy that the foolish little caress made his heart hammer in his ears.

"I think, K., that is how one can always tell when it is the right one, and will be the right one forever and ever. It is the person — one goes to in trouble."

He had no words for that, only little caressing touches of her arm, her hand. Perhaps, without knowing it, he was formulating a sort of prayer that, since there must be troubles, she would always come to him and he would always be able to help her.

And Sidney, too, fell silent. She was recalling the day she became engaged to Max, and the lost feeling she had had. She did not feel the same at all now. She felt as if she had been wandering, and had come home to the arms that were about her. She would be married, and take the risk that all women took, with her eyes open. She would go through the valley of the shadow, as other women did; but K. would be with her. Nothing else mattered. Looking into his steady eyes, she knew that she was safe. She would never wither for him.

Where before she had felt the clutch of inexorable destiny, the woman's fate, now she felt only his arms about her, her cheek on his shabby coat.

"I shall love you all my life," she said shakily.

His arms tightened about her.

The little house was dark when they got back to it. The Street, which had heard that Mr. Le Moyne

approved of night air, was raising its windows for the night and pinning cheesecloth bags over its curtains to keep them clean.

In the second-story front room at Mrs. McKee's, the barytone slept heavily, and made divers unvocal sounds. He was hardening his throat, and so slept with a wet towel about it.

Down on the doorstep, Mrs. McKee and Mr. Wagner sat and made love with the aid of a lighted match and the pencil-pad.

The car drew up at the little house, and Sidney got out. Then it drove away, for K. must take it to the garage and walk back.

Sidney sat on the doorstep and waited. How lovely it all was! How beautiful life was! If one did one's best by life, it did its best too. How steady K.'s eyes were! She saw the flicker of the match across the street, and knew what it meant. Once she would have thought that that was funny; now it seemed very touching to her.

Katie had heard the car, and now she came heavily along the hall.

"A woman left this for Mr. K.," she said. "If you think it's a begging letter, you'd better keep it until he's bought his new suit to-morrow. Almost any moment he's likely to bust out."

But it was not a begging letter. K. read it in the hall, with Sidney's shining eyes on him. It began abruptly: —

"I'm going to Africa with one of my cousins. She is a medical missionary. Perhaps I can work things out there. It is a bad station on the West Coast. I am not going because I feel any call to the work, but because I do not know what else to do.

"You were kind to me the other day. I believe, if I had told you then, you would still have been kind. I tried to tell you, but I was so terribly afraid.

"If I caused death, I did not mean to. You will think that no excuse, but it is true. In the hospital, when I changed the bottles on Miss Page's medicine-tray, I did not care much what happened. But it was different with you.

"You dismissed me, you remember. I had been careless about a sponge count. I made up my mind to get back at you. It seemed hopeless — you were so secure. For two or three days I tried to think of some way to hurt you. I almost gave up. Then I found the way.

"You remember the packets of gauze sponges we made and used in the operating-room? There were twelve to each package. When we counted them as we got them out, we counted by packages. On the night before I left, I went to the operating-room and added one sponge every here and there. Out of every dozen packets, perhaps, I fixed one that had thirteen. The next day I went away.

"Then I was terrified. What if somebody died? I had meant to give you trouble, so you would have to do certain cases a second time. I swear that was

all. I was so frightened that I went down sick over it. When I got better, I heard you had lost a case and the cause was being whispered about. I almost died of terror.

"I tried to get back into the hospital one night. I went up the fire-escape, but the windows were locked. Then I left the city. I could n't stand it. I was afraid to read a newspaper.

"I am not going to sign this letter. You know who it is from. And I am not going to ask your forgiveness, or anything of that sort. I don't expect it. But one thing hurt me more than anything else, the other night. You said you'd lost your faith in yourself. This is to tell you that you need not. And you said something else — that any one can 'come back.' I wonder!"

K. stood in the hall of the little house with the letter in his hand. Just beyond on the doorstep was Sidney, waiting for him. His arms were still warm from the touch of her. Beyond lay the Street, and beyond that lay the world and a man's work to do. Work, and faith to do it, a good woman's hand in the dark, a Providence that made things right in the end.

"Are you coming, K.?"

"Coming," he said. And, when he was beside her, his long figure folded to the short measure of the step, he stooped humbly and kissed the hem of her soft white dress.

Across the Street, Mr. Wagner wrote something in the dark and then lighted a match.

"So K. is in love with Sidney Page, after all!" he had written. "She is a sweet girl, and he is every inch a man. But, to my mind, a certain lady —"

Mrs. McKee flushed and blew out the match.

Late September now on the Street, with Joe gone and his mother eyeing the postman with pitiful eagerness; with Mrs. Rosenfeld moving heavily about the setting-up of the new furniture; and with Johnny driving heavenly cars, brake and clutch legs well and strong. Late September, with Max recovering and settling his tie for any pretty nurse who happened along, but listening eagerly for Dr. Ed's square tread in the hall; with Tillie rocking her baby on the porch at Schwitter's, and Carlotta staring westward over rolling seas; with Christine taking up her burden and Grace laying hers down; with Joe's tragic young eyes growing quiet with the peace of the tropics.

Late September, with the nurses on their knees at prayers in the little parlor, and the Head reading, her voice weary with the day and with good works.

"The Lord is my shepherd," she reads. "I shall not want." . . . "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Sidney, on her knees in the little parlor, repeats the words with the others. K. has gone from the Street, and before long she will join him. With the

vision of his steady eyes before her, she adds her own prayer to the others — that the touch of his arms about her may not make her forget the vow she has taken, of charity and its sister, service, of a cup of water to the thirsty, of open arms to a tired child.

THE END

II

THE AMAZING INTERLUDE

THE AMAZING INTERLUDE

I

THE stage on which we play our little dramas of life and love has for most of us but one setting. It is furnished out with approximately the same things. Characters come, move about and make their final exits through long-familiar doors. And the back drop remains approximately the same from beginning to end. Palace or hovel, forest or sea, it is the background for the moving figures of the play.

So Sara Lee Kennedy had a back drop that had every appearance of permanency. The great Scene Painter apparently intended that there should be no change of set for her. Sara Lee herself certainly expected none.

But now and then amazing things are done on this great stage of ours: lights go down; the back drop, which had given the illusion of solidity, reveals itself transparent. A sort of fairyland transformation takes place. Beyond the once solid wall strange figures move on — a new *mise en scène,* with the old blotted out in darkness. The lady, whom we left knitting by

the fire, becomes a fairy — Sara Lee became a fairy, of a sort — and meets the prince. Adventure, too; and love, of course. And then the lights go out, and it is the same old back drop again, and the lady is back by the fire — but with a memory.

This is the story of Sara Lee Kennedy's memory — and of something more.

The early days of the great war saw Sara Lee playing her part in the setting of a city in Pennsylvania. An ugly city, but a wealthy one. It is only fair to Sara Lee to say that she shared in neither quality. She was far from ugly, and very, very far from rich. She had started her part with a full stage, to carry on the figure, but one by one they had gone away into the wings and had not come back. At nineteen she was alone knitting by the fire, with no idea whatever that the back drop was of painted net, and that beyond it, waiting for its moment, was the forest of adventure. A strange forest, too — one that Sara Lee would not have recognised as a forest. And a prince of course — but a prince as strange and mysterious as the forest.

The end of December, 1914, found Sara Lee quite contented. If it was resignation rather than content, no one but Sara Lee knew the difference. Knitting, too; but not for soldiers. She was, to be candid, knitting an afghan against an interesting event which involved a friend of hers.

Sara Lee rather deplored the event — in her own

mind, of course, for in her small circle young unmarried women accepted the major events of life without question, and certainly without conversation. She never, for instance, allowed her Uncle James, with whom she lived, to see her working at the afghan; and even her Aunt Harriet had supposed it to be a sweater until it assumed uncompromising proportions.

Sara Lee's days, up to the twentieth of December, 1914, had been much alike. In the mornings she straightened up her room, which she had copied from one in a woman's magazine, with the result that it gave somehow the impression of a baby's bassinet, being largely dotted Swiss and ribbon. Yet in a way it was a perfect setting for Sara Lee herself. It was fresh and virginal, and very, very neat and white. A resigned little room, like Sara Lee, resigned to being tucked away in a corner and to having no particular outlook. Peaceful, too.

Sometimes in the morning between straightening her room and going to the market for Aunt Harriet, Sara Lee looked at a newspaper. So she knew there was a war. She read the headings, and when the matter came up for mention at the little afternoon bridge club, as it did now and then after the prizes were distributed, she always said "Isn't it horrible!" and changed the subject.

On the night of the nineteenth of December Sara Lee had read her chapter in the Bible — she read it through once each year — and had braided down her hair, which was as smooth and shining and lovely as

Sara Lee herself, and had raised her window for the night when Aunt Harriet came in. Sara Lee did not know, at first, that she had a visitor. She stood looking out toward the east, until Aunt Harriet touched her on the arm.

"What in the world!" said Aunt Harriet. "A body would suppose it was August."

"I was just thinking," said Sara Lee.

"You'd better do your thinking in bed. Jump in and I'll put out your light."

So Sara Lee got into her white bed with the dotted Swiss valance, and drew the covers to her chin, and looked a scant sixteen. Aunt Harriet, who was an unsentimental woman, childless and diffident, found her suddenly very appealing there in her smooth bed, and did an unexpected thing. She kissed her. Then feeling extremely uncomfortable she put out the light and went to the door. There she paused.

"Thinking!" she said. "What about, Sara Lee?"

Perhaps it was because the light was out that Sara Lee became articulate. Perhaps it was because things that had been forming in her young mind for weeks had at last crystallized into words. Perhaps it was because of a picture she had happened on that day, of a boy lying wounded somewhere on a battlefield and calling "Mother!"

"About — over there," she said rather hesitatingly. "And about Anna."

"Over there?"

"The war," said Sara Lee. "I was just thinking

about all those women over there — like Anna, you know. They — they had babies, and got everything ready for them. And then the babies grew up, and — they're all getting killed."

"It's horrible," said Aunt Harriet. "Do you want another blanket? It's cold to-night."

Sara Lee did not wish another blanket.

"I'm a little worried about your Uncle James," said Aunt Harriet, at the door. "He's got indigestion. I think I'll make him a mustard plaster."

She prepared to go out then, but Sara Lee spoke from her white bed.

"Aunt Harriet," she said, "I don't think I'll ever get married."

"I said that too, once," said Aunt Harriet complacently. "What's got into your head now?"

"I don't know," Sara Lee replied vaguely. "I just —— What's the use?"

Aunt Harriet was conscious of a hazy impression of indelicacy. Coming from Sara Lee it was startling and revolutionary. In Aunt Harriet's world young women did not question their duty, which was to marry, preferably some one in the neighborhood, and bear children, who would be wheeled about that same neighborhood in perambulators and who would ultimately grow up and look after themselves.

"The use?" she asked tartly.

"Of having babies, and getting to care about them, and then —— There will always be wars, won't there?"

"You turn over and go to sleep," counseled Aunt Harriet. "And stop looking twenty years or more ahead." She hesitated. "You haven't quarreled with Harvey, have you?"

Sara Lee turned over obediently.

"No. It's not that," she said. And the door closed.

Perhaps, had she ever had time during the crowded months that followed, Sara Lee would have dated certain things from that cold frosty night in December when she began to question things. For after all that was what it came to. She did not revolt. She questioned.

She lay in her white bed and looked at things for the first time. The sky had seemed low that night. Things were nearer. The horizon was close. And beyond that peaceful horizon, to the east, something was going on that could not be ignored. Men were dying. Killing and dying. Men who had been waited for as Anna watched for her child.

Downstairs she could hear Aunt Harriet moving about. The street was quiet, until a crowd of young people — she knew them by their voices — went by, laughing.

"It's horrible," said Sara Lee to herself. There was a change in her, but she was still inarticulate. Somewhere in her mind, but not formulated, was the feeling that she was too comfortable. Her peace was a cheap peace, bought at no price. Her last waking

determination was to finish the afghan quickly and to begin to knit for the men at the war.

Uncle James was ill the next morning. Sara Lee went for the doctor, but Anna's hour had come and he was with her. Late in the afternoon he came, however, looking a bit gray round the mouth with fatigue, but triumphant. He had on these occasions always a sense of victory; even, in a way, a feeling of being part of a great purpose. He talked at such times of the race, as one may who is doing his best by it.

"Well," he said when Sara Lee opened the door, "it's a boy. Eight pounds. Going to be red-headed, too." He chuckled.

"A boy!" said Sara Lee. "I — don't you bring any girl babies any more?"

The doctor put down his hat and glanced at her.

"Wanted a girl, to be named for you?"

"No. It's not that. It's only ——" She checked herself. He wouldn't understand. The race required girl babies. "I've put a blue bow on my afghan. Pink is for boys," she said, and led the way upstairs.

Very simple and orderly was the small house, as simple and orderly as Sara Lee's days in it. Time was to come when Sara Lee, having left it, ached for it with every fiber of her body and her soul — for its bright curtains and fresh paint, its regularity, its shining brasses and growing plants, its very kitchen pans and green-and-white oilcloth. She was to ache, too,

for her friends — their small engrossing cares, their kindly interest, their familiar faces.

Time was to come, too, when she came back, not to the little house, it is true, but to her friends, to Anna and the others. But they had not grown and Sara Lee had. And that is the story.

Uncle James died the next day. One moment he was there, an uneasy figure, under the tulip quilt, and the next he had gone away entirely, leaving a terrible quiet behind him. He had been the center of the little house, a big and cheery and not over-orderly center. Followed his going not only quiet, but a wretched tidiness. There was nothing for Sara Lee to do but to think.

And, in the way of mourning women, things that Uncle James had said which had passed unheeded came back to her. One of them was when he had proposed to adopt a Belgian child, and Aunt Harriet had offered horrified protest.

"All right," he had said. "Of course, if you feel that way about it——! But I feel kind of mean sometimes, sitting here doing nothing when there's such a lot to be done."

Then he had gone for a walk and had come back cheerful enough but rather quiet.

There was that other time, too, when the German Army was hurling itself, wave after wave, across the Yser — only of course Sara Lee knew nothing of the Yser then — and when it seemed as though the attenuated Allied line must surely crack and give. He had

said then that if he were only twenty years younger he would go across and help.

"And what about me?" Aunt Harriet had asked. "But I suppose I wouldn't matter."

"You could go to Jennie's, couldn't you?"

There had followed one of those absurd wrangles as to whether or not Aunt Harriet would go to Jennie's in the rather remote contingency of Uncle James' becoming twenty years younger and going away.

And now Uncle James had taken on the wings of the morning and was indeed gone away. And again it became a question of Jennie's. Aunt Harriet, rather dazed at first, took to arguing it pro and con.

"Of course she has room for me," she would say in her thin voice. "There's that little room that was Edgar's. There's nobody in it now. But there's only room for a single bed, Sara Lee."

Sara Lee was knitting socks now, all a trifle tight as to heel. "I know," she would say. "I'll get along. Don't you worry about me."

Always these talks ended on a note of exasperation for Aunt Harriet. For Sara Lee's statement that she could manage would draw forth a plaintive burst from the older woman.

"If only you'd marry Harvey," she would say. "I don't know what's come over you. You used to like him well enough."

"I still like him."

"I've seen you jump when the telephone bell rang. Your Uncle James often spoke about it. He noticed

more than most people thought." She followed Sara Lee's eyes down the street to where Anna was wheeling her baby slowly up and down. Even from that distance Sara Lee could see the bit of pink which was the bow on her afghan. "I believe you're afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Of having children," accused Aunt Harriet fretfully.

Sara Lee colored.

"Perhaps I am," she said; "but not the sort of thing you think. I just don't see the use of it, that's all. Aunt Harriet, how long does it take to become a hospital nurse?"

"Mabel Andrews was three years. It spoiled her looks too. She used to be a right pretty girl."

"Three years," Sara Lee reflected. "By that time ——"

The house was very quiet and still those days. There was an interlude of emptiness and order, of long days during which Aunt Harriet alternately grieved and planned, and Sara Lee thought of many things. At the Red Cross meetings all sorts of stories were circulated; the Belgian atrocity tales had just reached the country, and were spreading like wildfire. There were arguments and disagreements. A girl named Schmidt was militant against them and soon found herself a small island of defiance entirely surrounded by disapproval. Mabel Andrews came once to a meetting and in businesslike fashion explained the Red Cross dressings and gave a lesson in bandaging.

Forerunner of the many first-aid classes to come was that hour of Mabel's, and made memorable by one thing she said.

"You might as well all get busy and learn to do such things," she stated in her brisk voice. "One of our *internes* is over there, and he says we'll be in it before spring."

After the meeting Sara Lee went up to Mabel and put a hand on her arm.

"Are you going?" she asked.

"Leaving day after to-morrow. Why?"

"I — couldn't I be useful over there?"

Mabel smiled rather grimly.

"What can you do?"

"I can cook."

"Only men cooks, my dear. What else?"

"I could clean up, couldn't I? There must be something. I'd do anything I could. Don't they have people to wash dishes and—all that?"

Mabel was on doubtful ground there. She knew of a woman who had been permitted to take over her own automobile, paying all her expenses and buying her own tires and gasoline.

"She carries supplies to small hospitals in out-of-the-way places," she said. "But I don't suppose you can do that, Sara Lee, can you?"

However, she gave Sara Lee a New York address, and Sara Lee wrote and offered herself. She said nothing to Aunt Harriet, who had by that time elected to take Edgar's room at Cousin Jennie's and was put-

ting Uncle James' clothes in tearful order to send to Belgium. After a time she received a reply.

"We have put your name on our list of volunteers," said the letter, "but of course you understand that only trained workers are needed now. France and England are full of untrained women who are eager to help."

It was that night that Sara Lee became engaged to Harvey.

Sara Lee's attitude toward Harvey was one that she never tried to analyze. When he was not with her she thought of him tenderly, romantically. This was perhaps due to the photograph of him on her mantel. There was a dash about the picture rather lacking in the original, for it was a profile, and in it the young man's longish hair, worn pompadour, the slight thrust forward of the head, the arch of the nostrils,— gave him a sort of tense eagerness, a look of running against the wind. From the photograph Harvey might have been a gladiator; as a matter of fact he was a bond salesman.

So during the daytime Sarah Lee looked — at intervals — at the photograph, and got that feel of drive and force. And in the evenings Harvey came, and she lost it. For, outside of a frame, he became a rather sturdy figure, of no romance, but of a comforting solidity. A kindly young man, with a rather wide face and hands disfigured as to fingers by much early baseball. He had heavy shoulders, the sort a girl

might rely on to carry many burdens. A younger and tidier Uncle James, indeed — the same cheery manner, the same robust integrity, and the same small ambition.

To earn enough to keep those dependent on him, and to do it fairly; to tell the truth and wear clean linen and not run into debt; and to marry Sara Lee and love and cherish her all his life — this was Harvey. A plain and likable man, a lover and husband to be sure of. But ——

He came that night to see Sarah Lee. There was nothing unusual about that. He came every night. But he came that night full of determination. That was not unusual, either, but it had not carried him far. He had no idea that his picture was romantic. He would have demanded it back had he so much as suspected it. He wore his hair in a pompadour because of the prosaic fact that he had a cow-lick. He was very humble about himself, and Sara Lee was to him as wonderful as his picture was to her.

Sara Lee was in the parlor, waiting for him. The one electric lamp was lighted, so that the phonograph in one corner became only a bit of reflected light. There was a gas fire going, and in front of it was a white fur rug. In Aunt Harriet's circle there were few orientals. The Encyclopædia Britannica, not yet entirely paid for, stood against the wall, and a leather chair, hollowed by Uncle James' solid body, was by the fire. It was just such a tidy, rather vulgar and home-

like room as no doubt Harvey would picture for his own home. He had of course never seen the white simplicity of Sara Lee's bedroom.

Sara Lee, in a black dress, admitted him. When he had taken off his ulster and his overshoes — he had been raised by women — and came in, she was standing by the fire.

"Raining," he said. "It's getting colder. May be snow before morning."

Then he stopped. Sometimes the wonder of Sara Lee got him in the throat. She had so much the look of being poised for flight. Even in her quietest moments there was that about her — a sort of repressed eagerness, a look of seeing things far away. Aunt Harriet said that there were times when she had a "flighty" look.

And that night it was that impression of elusiveness that stopped Harvey's amiable prattle about the weather and took him to her with his arms out.

"Sara Lee!" he said. "Don't look like that!"

"Like what?" said Sara Lee prosaically.

"I don't know," he muttered. "You — sometimes you look as though ——" Then he put his arms round her. "I love you," he said. "I'll be good to you, Sara Lee, if you'll have me." He bent down and put his cheek against hers. "If you'll only marry me, dear."

A woman has a way of thinking most clearly and lucidly when the man has stopped thinking. With his arms about her Harvey could only feel. He was

trembling. As for Sara Lee, instantly two pictures flashed through her mind, each distinct, each clear, almost photographic. One was of Anna, in her tiny house down the street, dragged with a nursing baby. The other was that one from a magazine of a boy dying on a battlefield and crying "Mother!"

Two sorts of maternity — one quiet, peaceful, not always beautiful, but the thing by which and to which she had been reared; the other vicarious, of all the world.

"Don't you love me — that way?" he said, his cheek still against hers.

"I don't know."

"You don't know!"

It was then that he straightened away from her and looked without seeing at the blur of light which was the phonograph. Sara Lee, glancing up, saw him then as he was in the photograph, face set and head thrust forward, and that clean-cut drive of jaw and backward flow of heavy hair that marked him all man, and virile man.

She slipped her hand into his.

"I do love you, Harvey," she said, and went into his arms with the complete surrender of a child.

He was outrageously happy. He sat on the arm of Uncle James' chair where she was almost swallowed up, and with his face against hers he made his simple plans. Now and then he kissed the little hollow under her ear, and because he knew nothing of the abandon of a woman in a great passion he missed nothing in her

attitude. Into her silence and passivity he read the reflection of his own adoring love and thought it hers.

To be fair to Sara Lee, she imagined that her content in Harvey's devotion was something more, as much more as was necessary. For in Sara Lee's experience marriage was a thing compounded of affection, habit, small differences and a home. Of passion, that passion which later she was to meet and suffer from, the terrible love that hurts and agonizes, she had never even dreamed.

Great days were before Sara Lee. She sat by the fire and knitted, and behind the back drop on the great stage of the world was preparing, unsuspected, the *mise en scène*.

II

ABOUT the middle of January Mabel Andrews wrote to Sara Lee from France, where she was already installed in a hospital at Calais.

The evening before the letter came Harvey had brought round the engagement ring. He had made a little money in war stocks, and into the ring he had put every dollar of his profits — and a great love, and gentleness, and hopes which he did not formulate even to himself.

It was a solitaire diamond, conventionally set, and larger, far larger, than the modest little stone on which Harvey had been casting anxious glances for months.

"Do you like it, honey?" he asked anxiously.

Sara Lee looked at it on her finger.

"It is lovely! It — it's terrible!" said poor Sara Lee, and cried on his shoulder.

Harvey was not subtle. He had never even heard of Mabel Andrews, and he had a tendency to restrict his war reading to the quarter column in the morning paper entitled "Salient Points of the Day's War News."

What could he know, for instance, of wounded men who were hungry? Which is what Mabel wrote about.

"You said you could cook," she had written. "Well, we need cooks, and something to cook. Some-

time they'll have it all fixed, no doubt, but just now it's awful, Sara Lee. The British have money and food, plenty of it. But here — yesterday I cut the clothes off a wounded Belgian boy. He had been forty-eight hours on a railway siding, without even soup or coffee."

It was early in the war then, and between Ypres and the sea stretched a long thin line of Belgian trenches. A frantic Belgian Government, thrust out of its own land, was facing the problem, with scant funds and with no *matériel* of any sort, for feeding that desolate little army. France had her own problems — her army, non-productive industrially, and the great and constantly growing British forces quartered there, paying for what they got, but requiring much. The world knows now of the starvation of German-occupied Belgium. What it does not know and may never know is of the struggle during those early days to feed the heroic Belgian Army in their wet and almost untenable trenches.

Hospital trains they could improvise out of what rolling stock remained to them. Money could be borrowed, and was. But food? Clothing? Ammunition? In his little villa on the seacoast the Belgian King knew that his soldiers were hungry, and paced the floor of his tiny living-room; and over in an American city whose skyline was as pointed with furnace turrets as Constantinople's is with mosques, over there Sara Lee heard that call of hunger, and — put on her engagement ring.

Later on that evening, with Harvey's wide cheerful face turned adoringly to her, Sara Lee formulated a question:

"Don't you sometimes feel as though you'd like to go to France and fight?"

"What for?"

"Well, they need men, don't they?"

"I guess they don't need me, honey. I'd be the dickens of a lot of use! Never fired a gun in my life."

"You could learn. It isn't hard."

Harvey sat upright and stared at her.

"Oh, if you want me to go——" he said, and waited.

Sara Lee twisted her ring on her finger.

"Nobody wants anybody to go," she said not very elegantly. "I'd just — I'd rather like to think you wanted to go."

That was almost too subtle for Harvey. Something about him was rather reminiscent of Uncle James on mornings when he was determined not to go to church.

"It's not our fight," he said. "And as far as that goes, I'm not so sure there isn't right on both sides. Or wrong. Most likely wrong. I'd look fine going over there to help the Allies, and then making up my mind it was the British who'd spilled the beans. Now let's talk about something interesting — for instance how much we love each other."

It was always "we" with Harvey. In his simple creed if a girl accepted a man and let him kiss her and wore his ring it was a reciprocal love affair. It never

occurred to him that sometimes as the evening dragged toward a close Sara Lee was just a bit weary of his arms, and that she sought, after he had gone, the haven of her little white room, and closed the door, and had to look rather a long time at his photograph before she was in a properly loving mood again.

But that night after his prolonged leave-taking Sara Lee went upstairs to her room and faced the situation.

She was going to marry Harvey. She was committed to that. And she loved him; not as he cared, perhaps, but he was a very definite part of her life. Once or twice when he had been detained by business she had missed him, had put in a lonely and most unhappy evening.

Sara Lee had known comparatively few men. In that small and simple circle of hers, with its tennis court in a vacant lot, its one or two inexpensive cars, its picnics and porch parties, there was none of the usual give and take of more sophisticated circles. Boys and girls paired off rather early, and remained paired by tacit agreement; there was comparatively little shifting. There were few free lances among the men, and none among the girls. When she was seventeen Harvey had made it known unmistakably that Sara Lee was his, and no trespassing. And for two years he had without intentional selfishness kept Sara Lee for himself.

That was how matters stood that January night when Sara Lee went upstairs after Harvey had gone

and read Mabel's letter, with Harvey's photograph turned to the wall. Under her calm exterior a little flame of rebellion was burning in her. Harvey's perpetual "we," his attitude toward the war, and Mabel's letter, with what it opened before her, had set the match to something in Sara Lee she did not recognize — a strain of the adventurer, a throw-back to some wandering ancestor perhaps. But more than anything it had set fire to the something maternal that is in all good women.

Yet, had Aunt Harriet not come in just then, the flame might have died. And had it died a certain small page of the history of this war would never have been written.

Aunt Harriet came in hesitatingly. She wore a black wrapper, and her face, with her hair drawn back for the night, looked tight and old.

"Harvey gone?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I thought I'd better come in. There's something —— I can tell you in the morning if you're tired."

"I'm not tired," said Sara Lee.

Aunt Harriet sat down miserably on a chair.

"I've had a letter from Jennie," she stated. "The girl's gone, and the children have whooping cough. She'd like me to come right away."

"To do the maid's work!" said Sara Lee indignantly. "You mustn't do it, that's all! She can get somebody."

But Aunt Harriet was firm. She was not a fair-weather friend, and since Jennie was good enough to offer her a home she felt she ought to go at once.

"You'll have to get married right away," she finished. "Goodness knows it's time enough! For two years Harvey has been barking like a watchdog in front of the house and keeping every other young man away."

Sara Lee smiled.

"He's only been lying on the doormat, Aunt Harriet," she observed. "I don't believe he knows how to bark."

"Oh, he's mild enough. He may change after marriage. Some do. But," she added hastily, "he'll be a good husband. He's that sort."

Suddenly something that had been taking shape in Sara Lee's small head, quite unknown to her, developed identity and speech.

"But I'm not going to marry him just yet," she said.

Aunt Harriet's eyes fell on the photograph with its face to the wall, and she started.

"You haven't quarreled with him, have you?"

"No, of course not! I have something else I want to do first. That's all. Aunt Harriet, I want to go to France."

Aunt Harriet began to tremble, and Sara Lee went over and put her young arms about her.

"Don't look like that," she said. "It's only for a

little while. I've got to go. I just have to, that's all!"

"Go how?" demanded Aunt Harriet.

"I don't know. I'll find some way. I've had a letter from Mabel. Things are awful over there."

"And how will you help them?" Her face worked nervously. "Is it going to help for you to be shot? Or carried off by the Germans?" The atrocity stories were all that Aunt Harriet knew of the war, and all she could think of now. "You'll come back with your hands cut off."

Sara Lee straightened and looked out where between the white curtains the spire of the Methodist Church marked the east.

"I'm going," she said. And she stood there, already poised for flight.

There was no sleep in the little house that night. Sara Lee could hear the older woman moving about in her lonely bed, where the spring still sagged from Uncle James' heavy form, and at last she went in and crept in beside her. Toward morning Aunt Harriet slept, with the girl's arm across her; and then Sara Lee went back to her room and tried to plan.

She had a little money, and she had heard that living was cheap abroad. She could get across then, and perhaps keep herself. But she must do more than that, to justify her going. She must get money, and then decide how the money was to be spent. If she could only talk it over with Uncle James! Or, with Harvey. Harvey knew about business and money.

But she dared not go to Harvey. She was terribly frightened when she even thought of him. There was no hope of making him understand; and no chance of reasoning with him, because, to be frank, she had no reasons. She had only instinct — instinct and a great tenderness toward suffering. No, obviously Harvey must not know until everything was arranged.

That morning the Methodist Church packed a barrel for the Belgians. There was a real rite of placing in it Mrs. Augustus Gregory's old sealskin coat, now a light brown and badly worn, but for years the only one in the neighborhood. Various familiar articles appeared, to be thrust into darkness, only to emerge in surroundings never dreamed of in their better days — the little Howard boy's first trouser suit; the clothing of a baby that had never lived; big Joe Hemmingway's dress suit, the one he was married in and now too small for him. And here and there things that could ill be spared, brought in and offered with resolute cheerfulness.

Sara Lee brought some of Uncle James' things, and was at once set to work. The women there called Sara Lee capable, but it was to take other surroundings to bring out her real efficiency.

And it was when bending over a barrel, while round her went on that pitying talk of women about a great calamity, that Sara Lee got her great idea; and later on she made the only speech of her life.

That evening Harvey went home in a quiet glow of happiness. He had had a good day. And he had

heard of a little house that would exactly suit Sara Lee and him. He did not notice his sister's silence when he spoke about it. He was absorbed, manlike, in his plans.

"The Leete house," he said in answer to her perfunctory question. "Will Leete has lost his mind and volunteered for the ambulance service in France. Mrs. Leete is going to her mother's."

"Maybe he feels it's his duty. He can drive a car, and they have no children."

"Duty nothing!" He seemed almost unduly irritated. "He's tired of the commission business, that's all. Y'ought to have heard the fellows in the office. Anyhow, they want to sub-let the house, and I'm going to take Sara Lee there to-night."

His sister looked at him, and there was in her face something of the expression of the women that day as they packed the barrel. But she said nothing until he was leaving the house that night. Then she put a hand on his arm. She was a weary little woman, older than Harvey, and tired with many children. She had been gathering up small overshoes in the hall and he had stopped to help her.

"You know, Harvey, Sara Lee's not —— I always think she's different, somehow."

"Well, I guess yes! There's nobody like her."

"You can't bully her, you know."

Harvey stared at her with honestly perplexed eyes.

"Bully!" he said. "What on earth makes you say that?"

Then he laughed.

"Don't you worry, Belle," he said. "I know I'm a fierce and domineering person, but if there's any bullying I know who'll do it."

"She's not like the other girls you know," she reiterated rather helplessly.

"Sure she's not! But she's enough like them to need a house to live in. And if she isn't crazy about the Leete place I'll eat it."

He banged out cheerfully, whistling as he went down the street. He stopped whistling, however, at Sara Lee's door. The neighborhood preserved certain traditions as to a house of mourning. It lowered its voice in passing and made its calls of condolence in dark clothes and a general air of gloom. Pianos near by were played only with the windows closed, and even the milkman leaving his bottles walked on tiptoe and presented his monthly bill solemnly.

So Harvey stopped whistling, rang the bell apologetically, and — faced a new and vivid Sara Lee, flushed and with shining eyes, but woefully frightened.

She told him almost at once. He had only reached the dining room of the Leete house, which he was explaining had a white wainscoting, when she interrupted him. The ladies of the Methodist Church were going to collect a certain amount each month to support a soup kitchen as near the Front as possible.

"Good work!" said Harvey heartily. "I suppose they do get hungry, poor devils. Now about the dining room ——"

"Harvey dear," Sara Lee broke in, "I've not finished. I — I'm going over to run it."

"You are not!"

"But I am! It's all arranged. It's my plan. They've all wanted to do something besides giving clothes. They send barrels, and they never hear from them again, and it's hard to keep interested. But with me there, writing home and telling them, 'To-day we served soup to this man, and that man, perhaps wounded. And — and that sort of thing — don't you see how interested every one will be? Mrs. Gregory has promised twenty-five dollars a month, and ——"

"You're not going," said Harvey in a flat tone. "That's all. Don't talk to me about it."

Sara Lee flushed deeper and started again, but rather hopelessly. There was no converting a man who would not argue or reason, who based everything on flat refusal.

"But somebody must go," she said with a tightening of her voice. "Here's Mabel Andrews' letter. Read it and you will understand."

"I don't want to read it."

Nevertheless he took it and read it. He read slowly. He did nothing quickly except assert his masculine domination. He had all the faults of his virtues; he was as slow as he was sure, as unimaginative as he was faithful.

He read it and gave it back to her.

"I don't think you mean it," he said. "I give you credit for too much sense. Maybe some one is needed

over there. I guess things are pretty bad. But why should you make it your affair? There are about a million women in this country that haven't got anything else to do. Let them go."

"Some of them will. But they're afraid, mostly."

"Afraid! My God, I should think they would be afraid! And you're asking me to let you go into danger, to put off our wedding while you wander about over there with a million men and no women and ——"

"You're wrong, Harvey dear," said Sara Lee in a low voice. "I am not asking you at all. I am telling you that I am going."

Sara Lee's leaving made an enormous stir in her small community. Opinion was divided. She was right according to some; she was mad according to others. The women of the Methodist Church, finding a real field of activity, stood behind her solidly. Guaranties of funds came in in a steady flow, though the amounts were small; and, on the word going about that she was to start a soup kitchen for the wounded, housewives sent in directions for making their most cherished soups.

Sara Lee, going to a land where the meat was mostly horse and where vegetables were scarce and limited to potatoes, Brussels sprouts and cabbage, found herself the possessor of recipes for making such sick-room dainties as mushroom soup, cream of asparagus, clam broth with whipped cream, and — from Mrs. Gregory, the wealthy woman of the church — green turtle and consommé.

She was very busy and rather sad. She was helping Aunt Harriet to close the house and getting her small wardrobe in order. And once a day she went to a school of languages and painfully learned from a fierce and kindly old Frenchman a list of French nouns and prefixes like this: *Le livre, le crayon, la plume, la fenêtre,* and so on. By the end of ten days she could say: *"La rose sent-elle bon?"*

Considering that Harvey came every night and ran the gamut of the emotions, from pleading and expostulation at eight o'clock to black fury at ten, when he banged out of the house, Sara Lee was amazingly calm. If she had moments of weakness, when the call from overseas was less insistent than the call for peace and protection — if the nightly drawn picture of the Leete house, with tile mantels and a white bathroom, sometimes obtruded itself as against her approaching homelessness, Sara Lee made no sign.

She had her photograph taken for her passport, and when Harvey refused one she sent it to him by mail, with the word "Please" in the corner. Harvey groaned over it, and got it out at night and scolded it wildly; and then slept with it under his pillows, when he slept at all.

Not Sara Lee, and certainly not Harvey, knew what was calling her. And even later, when waves of homesickness racked her with wild remorse, she knew that she had had to go and that she could not return until she had done the thing for which she had been sent, whatever that might be.

III

THE first thing that struck Sara Lee was the way she was saying her nightly prayers in all sorts of odd places. In trains and in hotels and, after sufficient interval, in the steamer. She prayed under these novel circumstances to be made a better girl, and to do a lot of good over there, and to be forgiven for hurting Harvey. She did this every night, and then got into her narrow bed and studied French nouns — because she had decided that there was no time for verbs — and numbers, which put her to sleep.

"Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq," Sara Lee would begin, and go on, rocking gently in her berth as the steamer rolled. "Vingt, vingt-et-un, vingt-deux, trente, trente-et-un ——" Her voice would die away. The book on the floor and Harvey's picture on the tiny table, Sara Lee would sleep. And as the ship trembled the light over her head would shine on Harvey's ring, and it glistened like a tear.

One thing surprised her as she gradually met some of her fellow passengers. She was not alone on her errand. Others there were on board, young and old women, and men, too, who had felt the call of mercy and were going, as ignorant as she, to help. As ignorant, but not so friendless. Most of them were accredited somewhere. They had definite objectives. But what was more alarming — they talked in big

figures. Great organizations were behind them. She heard of the rehabilitation of Belgium, and portable hospitals, and millions of dollars, and Red Cross trains.

Not once did Sara Lee hear of anything so humble as a soup kitchen. The war was a vast thing, they would observe. It could only be touched by great organizations. Individual effort was negligible.

Once she took her courage in her hands.

"But I should think," she said, "that even great organizations depend on the — on individual efforts."

The portable hospital woman turned to her patronizingly.

"Certainly, my dear," she said. "But coördinated — coördinated."

It is hard to say just when the lights went down on Sara Lee's quiet stage and the interlude began. Not on the steamer, for after three days of discouragement and good weather they struck a storm; and Sara Lee's fine frenzy died for a time, of nausea. She did not appear again until the boat entered the Mersey, a pale and shaken angel of mercy, not at all sure of her wings, and most terribly homesick.

That night Sara Lee made a friend, one that Harvey would have approved of, an elderly Englishman named Travers. He was standing by the rail in the rain looking out at the blinking signal lights on both sides of the river. The ship for the first time had abandoned its policy of darkness and the decks were bathed in light.

Overhead the yardarm blinkers were signaling. and

directly over Sara Lee's head a great white searchlight swept the water ahead. The wind was blowing a gale, and the red and green lights of the pilot boat swung in great arcs that seemed to touch the waves on either side.

Sara Lee stood beside Mr. Travers, for companionship only. He had preserved a typically British aloofness during the voyage, and he had never spoken to her. But there was something forlorn in Sara Lee that night as she clutched her hat with both hands and stared out at the shore lights. And if he had been silent during the voyage he had not been deaf. So he knew why almost every woman on the ship was making the voyage; but he knew nothing about Sara Lee.

"Bad night," said Mr. Travers.

"I was wondering what they are trying to do with that little boat."

Mr. Travers concealed the surprise of a man who was making his seventy-second voyage.

"That's the pilot boat," he explained. "We are picking up a pilot."

"But," marveled Sara Lee rather breathlessly, "have we come all the way without any pilot?"

He explained that to her, and showed her a few moments later how the pilot came with incredible rapidity up the swaying rope ladder and over the side.

To be honest, he had been watching for the pilot boat, not to see what to Sara Lee was the thrilling progress of the pilot up the ladder, but to get the newspapers he would bring on with him. It is perhaps ex-

planatory of the way things went for Sara Lee from that time on that he quite forgot his newspapers.

The chairs were gone from the decks, preparatory to the morning landing, so they walked about and Sara Lee at last told him her story — the ladies of the Methodist Church, and the one hundred dollars a month she was to have, outside of her traveling expenses, to found and keep going a soup kitchen behind the lines.

"A hundred dollars a month," he said. "That's twenty pounds. Humph! Good God!"

But this last was under his breath.

Then she told him of Mabel Andrews' letter, and at last read it to him. He listened attentively. "Of course," she said when she had put the letter back into her bag, "I can't feed a lot, even with soup. But if I only help a few, it's worth doing, isn't it?"

"Very much worth doing," he said gravely. "I suppose you are not, by any chance, going to write a weekly article for one of your newspapers about what you are doing?"

"I hadn't thought of it. Do you think I should?"

Quite unexpectedly Mr. Travers patted her shoulder.

"My dear child," he said, "now and then I find somebody who helps to revive my faith in human nature. Thank you."

Sara Lee did not understand. The touch on the shoulder had made her think suddenly of Uncle James, and her chin quivered.

"I'm just a little frightened," she said in a small voice.

"Twenty pounds!" repeated Mr. Travers to himself. "Twenty pounds!" And aloud: "Of course you speak French?"

"Very little. I've had six lessons, and I can count — some."

The sense of unreality which the twenty pounds had roused in Mr. Travers' cautious British mind grew. No money, no French, no objective, just a great human desire to be useful in her own small way — this was a new type to him. What a sporting chance this frail bit of a girl was taking! And he noticed now something that had escaped him before — a dauntlessness, a courage of the spirit rather than of the body, that was in the very poise of her head.

"I'm not afraid about the language," she was saying. "I have a phrase book. And a hungry man, maybe sick or wounded, can understand a bowl of soup in any language, I should think. And I can cook!"

It was a perplexed and thoughtful Mr. Travers who sipped his Scotch-and-soda in the smoking room before retiring. He took the problem to bed with him and woke up in the night saying: "Twenty pounds! Good God!"

In the morning they left the ship. He found Sara Lee among the K's, waiting to have her passport examined, and asked her where she was stopping in London. She had read somewhere of Claridge's — in a novel probably.

"I shouldn't advise Claridge's," he said, reflecting

rather grimly on the charges of that very exclusive hotel. "Suppose you let me make a suggestion."

So he wrote out the name of a fine old English house on Trafalgar Square, where she could stay until she went to France. There would be the matter of a passport to cross the Channel. It might take a day or two. Perhaps he could help her. He would give himself the pleasure of calling on her very soon.

Sara Lee got on the train and rode up to London. She said to herself over and over: "This is England. I am really in England." But it did not remove the sense of unreality. Even the English grass, bright green in midwinter, only added to the sense of unreality.

She tried, sitting in the strange train with its small compartments, to think of Harvey. She looked at her ring and tried to recall some of the tender things he had said to her. But Harvey eluded her. She could not hear his voice. And when she tried to see him it was Harvey of the wide face and the angry eyes of the last days that she saw.

Morley's comforted her. The man at the door had been there for forty years, and was beyond surprise. He had her story in twenty-four hours, and in forty-eight he was her slave. The elderly chambermaid mothered her, and failed to report that Sara Lee was doing a small washing in her room and had pasted handkerchiefs over the ancient walnut of her wardrobe.

"Going over, are you?" she said. "Dear me, what courage you've got, miss! They tell me things is horrible over there."

"That's why I'm going," replied Sara Lee, and insisted on helping to make up the bed.

"It's easier when two do it," she said casually.

Mr. Travers put in a fretful twenty-four hours before he came to see her. He lunched at Brooks', and astounded an elderly member of the House by putting her problem to him.

"A young girl!" exclaimed the M. P. "Why, deuce take it, it's no place for a young girl."

"An American," explained Mr. Travers uncomfortably. "She's perfectly able to look after herself."

"Probably a correspondent in disguise. They'll go to any lengths."

"She's not a correspondent."

"Let her stay in Boulogne. There's work there in the hospitals."

"She's not a nurse. She's a — well, she's a cook. Or so she says."

The M. P. stared at Mr. Travers, and Mr. Travers stared back defiantly.

"What in the name of God is she going to cook?"

"Soup," said Mr. Travers in a voice of suppressed irritation. "She's got a little money, and she wants to establish a soup kitchen behind the Belgian trenches on a line of communication. I suppose," he continued angrily, "even you will admit that the Belgian Army needs all the soup it can get"

"I don't approve of women near the lines."

"Neither do I. But I'm exceedingly glad that a few of them have the courage to go there."

"What's she going to make soup out of?"

"I'm not a cooking expert. But I know her and I fancy she'll manage."

It ended by the M. P. agreeing to use his influence with the War Office to get Sara Lee to France. He was very unwilling. The spy question was looming large those days. Even the Red Cross had unwittingly spread its protection over more than one German agent. The lines were being drawn in.

"I may possibly get her to France. I don't know, of course," he said in that ungracious tone in which an Englishman often grants a favor which he will go to any amount of trouble to do. "After that it's up to her."

Mr. Travers reflected rather grimly that after that it was apparently up to him.

Sara Lee sat in her room at Morley's Hotel and looked out at the life of London — policemen with chin straps; schoolboys in high silk hats and Eton suits, the hats generally in disreputable condition; clerks dressed as men at home dressed for Easter Sunday church; and men in uniforms. Only a fair sprinkling of these last, in those early days. On the first afternoon there was a military funeral. A regiment of Scots, in kilts, came swinging down from the church of St. Martin in the Fields, tall and wonderful men, grave and very sad. Behind them, on a gun carriage,

was the body of their officer, with the British flag over the casket and his sword and cap on the top.

Sara Lee cried bitterly. It was not until they had gone that she remembered that Harvey had always called the Scots men in women's petticoats. She felt a thrill of shame for him, and no amount of looking at his picture seemed to help.

Mr. Travers called the second afternoon and was received by August at the door as an old friend.

"She's waiting in there," he said. "Very nice young lady, sir. Very kind to everybody."

Mr. Travers found her by a window looking out. There was a recruiting meeting going on in Trafalgar Square, the speakers standing on the monument. Now and then there was a cheer, and some young fellow sheepishly offered himself. Sara Lee was having a mad desire to go over and offer herself too. Because, she reflected, she had been in London almost two days, and she was as far from France as ever. Not knowing, of course, that three months was a fair time for the slow methods then in vogue.

There was a young man in the room, but Sara Lee had not noticed him. He was a tall, very blond young man, in a dark-blue Belgian uniform with a quaint cap which allowed a gilt tassel to drop over his forehead. He sat on a sofa, curling up the ends of a very small mustache, his legs, in cavalry boots, crossed and extending a surprising distance beyond the sofa.

The lights were up now, beyond the back drop the stage darkened. A new scene with a vengeance, a

scene laid in strange surroundings, with men, whole men and wounded men and spying men — and Sara Lee and this young Belgian, whose name was Henri, and whose other name, because of what he suffered and what he did, we may not know.

IV

HENRI sat on his sofa and watched Sara Lee. Also he shamelessly listened to the conversation, not because he meant to be an eavesdropper but because he liked Sara Lee's voice. He had expected a highly inflected British voice, and instead here was something entirely different — that is, Sara Lee's endeavor to reconcile the English "a" with her normal western Pennsylvania pronunciation. She did it quite unintentionally, but she had a good ear and it was difficult, for instance, to say "rather" when Mr. Travers said "rawther."

Henri had a good ear too. And the man he was waiting for did not come. Also he had been to school in England and spoke English rather better than most British. So he heard a conversation like this, the gaps being what he lost:

MR. TRAVERS: —— to France, anyhow. After that ——

SARA LEE: Awfully sorry to be —— But what shall I do if I do get over? The chambermaid upstairs —— very difficult.

MR. TRAVERS: The proper and sensible thing is —— home.

SARA LEE: To America? But I haven't done anything yet.

Henri knew that she was an American. He also realized that she was on the verge of tears. He glared at poor Mr. Travers, who was doing his best, and lighted a French cigarette.

"There must be some way," said Sara Lee. "If they need help — and I have read you Mabel Andrews' letter — then I should think they'd be glad to send me."

"They would be, of course," he said. "But the fact is — there's been some trouble about spies, and ——"

Henri's eyes narrowed.

"Spies! And they think I'm a spy?"

"My dear child," remonstrated Mr. Travers, slightly exasperated, "they're not thinking about you at all. The War Office has never heard of you. It's a general rule."

Sara Lee was not placated.

"Let them cable home and find out about me. I can give them references. Why, all sorts of prominent people are sending me money. They must trust me, or they wouldn't."

There were no gaps for Henri now. Sara Lee did not care who heard her, and even Mr. Travers had slightly raised his voice. Henri was divided between a conviction that he ought to go away and a mad desire to join in the conversation, greatly augmented when Sara Lee went to the window and wiped her eyes.

"If you only spoke French ——" began Mr. Travers.

Sara Lee looked over her shoulder. "But of course I do!" she said. "And German and — and Yiddish, and all sorts of languages. Every spy does."

Henri smiled appreciatively.

It might all have ended there very easily. Sara Lee might have fought the War Office single-handed and won out, but it is extremely unlikely. The chances at that moment were that she would spend endless days and hours in anterooms, and tell her story and make her plea a hundred times. And then — go back home to Harvey and the Leete house, and after a time, like Mrs. Gregory, speak rather too often of "the time I went abroad."

But Sara Lee was to go to France, and even further, to the fragment of unconquered Belgium that remained. And never so long as she lived, would she be able to forget those days or to speak of them easily. So she stood by the window trying not to cry, and a little donkey drawing a coster's cart moved out in front of the traffic and was caught by a motor bus. There was only time for the picture — the tiny beast lying there and her owner wringing his hands. Such of the traffic as could get by swerved and went on. London must move, though a thousand willing little beasts lay dying.

And Sara moved too. One moment she was there by the window. And the next she had given a stifled cry and ran out.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Travers, and got up slowly.

Henri was already up and at the window. What he saw was Sara Lee making her way through the stream of vehicles, taking a dozen chances for her life. Henri waited until he saw her crouched by the donkey, its head on her knee. Then he, too, ran out.

That is how Henri, of no other name that may be given, met Sara Lee Kennedy, of Pennsylvania — under a London motor bus. And that, I think, will be the picture he carries of her until he dies, her soft eyes full of pity, utterly regardless of the dirt and the crowd and an expostulating bobby, with that grotesque and agonized head on her knees.

Henri crawled under the bus, though the policeman was extremely anxious to keep him out. And he ran a practiced eye over the injured donkey.

"It's dying," said Sara Lee with white lips.

"It will die," replied Henri, "but how soon? They are very strong, these little beasts."

The conductor of the bus made a suggestion then, one that froze the blood round Sara Lee's heart: "If you'll move away and let us run over it proper it'll be out of its trouble, miss."

Sara Lee raised haggard eyes to Henri.

"Did you hear that?" she said. "They'd do it too!"

The total result of a conference between four policemen, the costermonger, and, by that time, Mr. Travers — was to draw the animal off the street and into the

square. Sara Lee stuck close by. So, naturally, did Henri. And when the hopeless condition of Nellie, as they learned she was named, became increasingly evident, Henri behaved like a man and a soldier.

He got out his revolver and shot her in the brain.

"A kindness," he explained, as Sara Lee would have caught his hand. "The only way, mademoiselle."

Mr. Travers had the usual British hatred of a crowd and publicity, coupled with a deadly fear of getting into the papers, except through an occasional letter to the *Times*. He vanished just before the shot, and might have been seen moving rapidly through the square, turning over in his mind the difficulty of trying to treat young American girls like rational human beings.

But Henri understood. He had had a French mother, and there is a leaven of French blood in the American temperament, old Huguenot, some of it. So Americans love beauty and obey their impulses and find life good to do things rather than to be something or other more or less important. And so Henri could quite understand how Sara Lee had forgotten herself when Mr. Travers could not. And he understood, also, when Sara Lee, having composed the little dondey's quiet figure, straightened up with tears in her eyes.

"It was very dear of you to come out," she said. "And — of course it was the best thing."

She held out her hand. The crowd had gone. Traffic was moving again, racing to make up for five lost precious moments. The square was dark, that

first darkness of London, when air raids were threatened but had not yet taken place. From the top of the Admiralty, near by, a flashlight shot up into the air and began its nightly process of brushing the sky. Henri took her hand and bent over it.

"You are very brave, mademoiselle," he said, and touched her hand with his lips.

The amazing interlude had commenced.

V

YET for a day or two nothing much was changed. Mr. Travers sent Sara Lee a note that he was taking up her problem with the Foreign Office; and he did indeed make an attempt. He also requested his wife to ask Sara Lee to tea.

Sara Lee was extremely nervous on the day she went. She wore a black jacket suit with a white collar, and she carried Aunt Harriet's mink furs, Aunt Harriet mourning thoroughly and completely in black astrachan. She had the faculty of the young American girl of looking smart without much expense, and she appeared absurdly young.

She followed the neat maid up a wide staircase to a door with a screen just inside, and heard her name announced for the first time in her life. Sara Lee took a long breath and went inside, to a most discouraging half hour.

Mr. Travers was on the hearth rug. Mrs. Travers was in a chair, a portly woman with a not unkindly face, but the brusque manner many Englishwomen acquire after forty. She held Sara Lee's hand and gave her a complete if smiling inspection.

"And it is you who are moving heaven and earth to get to the Front! You — child!"

Sara Lee's heart fell, but she smiled also.

"But I am older than I look," she said. "And I am very strong."

Mrs. Travers looked helplessly at her husband, while she rang the bell for tea. That was another thing Sara Lee had read about but never seen — that ringing for tea. At home no one served afternoon tea; but at a party, when refreshments were coming, the hostess slipped out to the kitchen and gave a whispered order or two.

"I shall be frank with you," said Mrs. Travers. "I think it quite impossible. It is not getting you over. That might be done. And of course there are women over there — young ones too. But the army objects very seriously to their being in danger. And of course one never knows ——" Her voice trailed off vaguely. She implied, however, that what one never knows was best unknown.

"I have a niece over there," she said as the tea tray came in. "Her mother was fool enough to let her go. Now they can't get her back."

"Oh, dear!" said Sara Lee. "Can't they find her?"

"She won't come. Little idiot! She's in Paris, however. I daresay she is safe enough."

Mrs. Travers made the tea thoughtfully. So far Mr. Travers had hardly spoken, but he cheered in true British fashion at the sight of the tea. Sara Lee, exceedingly curious as to the purpose of a very small stand somewhat resembling a piano stool, which the maid had placed at her knee, learned that it was to hold her muffin plate.

"And now," said Mr. Travers, "suppose we come

to the point. There doesn't seem to be a chance to get you over, my child. Same answer everywhere. Place is full of untrained women. Spies have been using Red Cross passes. Result is that all the lines are drawn as tight as possible."

Sara Lee stared at him with wide eyes.

"But I can't go back," she said. "I — well, I just can't. They're raising the money for me, and all sorts of people are giving things. A — a friend of mine is baking cakes and sending on the money. She has three children, and ——"

She gulped.

"I thought everybody wanted to get help to the Belgians," she said.

A slightly grim smile showed itself on Mrs. Travers' face.

"I'm afraid you don't understand. It is you we want to help. Neither Mr. Travers nor I feel that a girl so young as you, and alone, has any place near the firing line. And that, I fancy, is where you wish to go. As to helping the Belgians, we have four in the house now. They do not belong to the same social circles, so they prefer tea in their own rooms. You are quite right about their needing help too. They cannot even make up their own beds."

"They are not all like that," broke in Mr. Travers hastily.

"Of course not. But I merely think that Miss — er — Kennedy should know both sides of the picture."

Somewhat later Sara Lee was ushered downstairs

by the neat maid, who stood on the steps and blew a whistle for a taxi — Sara Lee had come in a bus. She carried in her hand the address of a Belgian commission of relief at the Savoy Hotel, and in her heart, for the first time, a doubt of her errand. She gave the Savoy address mechanically and, huddled in a corner, gave way to wild and fearful misgivings.

Coming up she had sat on top of the bus and watched with wide curious eyes the strange traffic of London. The park had fascinated her — the little groups of drilling men in khaki, the mellow tones of a bugle, and here and there on the bridle paths well-groomed men and women on horseback, as clean-cut as the horses they rode, and on the surface as careless of what was happening across the Channel. But she saw nothing now. She sat back and twisted Harvey's ring on her finger, and saw herself going back, her work undone, her faith in herself shattered. And — Harvey's arms and the Leete house ready to receive her.

However, a ray of hope opened for her at the Savoy — not much, a prospect.

The Savoy was crowded. Men in uniform, a sprinkling of anxious-faced wives and daughters, and more than a sprinkling of gaily dressed and painted women, filled the lobby or made their way slowly up and down the staircase. It was all so utterly different from what she had expected — so bright, so full of life. These well-fed people — they seemed happy enough. Were they all wrong back home? Was the war the ghastly thing they thought it?

Long months afterward Sara Lee was to learn that the Savoy was not London. She was to learn other things — that America knew more, through a free press, of war conditions than did England. And she was to learn what never ceased to surprise her — the sporting instinct of the British which made their early slogan "Business as usual." Business and pleasure — but only on the surface. Underneath was a dogged and obstinate determination to make up as soon as possible for the humiliation of the early days of the war.

Those were the transition days in England. The people were slowly awaking to the magnitude of the thing that was happening to them. Certain elements of the press, long under political dominion, were preparing to come out for a coalition ministry. The question of high-explosive shells as against shrapnel was bitterly fought, some of the men at home standing fast for shrapnel, as valuable against German artillery as a garden hose. Men coming back from the Front were pleading for real help, not men only, not Red Cross, not food and supplies, but for something more competent than mere man power to hold back the deluge.

But over it all was that surface cheerfulness, that best-foot-forward attitude of London. And Sara Lee saw only that, and lost faith. She had come far to help. But here was food in plenty and bands playing and smiling men in uniform drinking tea and playing for a little. That, too, Sara Lee was to understand later; but just then she did not. At home there was

more surface depression. The atrocities, the plight of the Belgians, the honor list in the *Illustrated London News* — that was the war to Sara Lee. And here!

But later on, down in a crowded dark little room, things were different. She was one of a long line, mostly women. They were unhappy and desolate enough, God knows. They sat or stood with a sort of weary resignation. Now and then a short heavy man with an upcurled mustache came out and took in one or two. The door closed. And overhead the band played monotonously.

It was after seven when Sara Lee's turn came. The heavy-set man spoke to her in French, but he failed to use a single one of the words she had memorized.

"Don't you speak any English?" she asked helplessly.

"I do; but not much," he replied. Though his French had been rapid he spoke English slowly. "How can we serve you, mademoiselle?"

"I don't want any assistance. I — I want to help, if I can."

"Here?"

"In France. Or Belgium."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We have many offers of help. What we need, mademoiselle, is not workers. We have, at our base hospital, already many English nurses."

"I am not a nurse."

"I am sorry. The whole world is sorry for Belgium, and many would work. What we need"— he

shrugged his shoulders again —" is food, clothing, supplies for our brave little soldiers."

Sara Lee looked extremely small and young. The Belgian sat down on a chair and surveyed her carefully.

" You English are doing a — a fine work for us," he observed. " We are grateful. But of course the " — he hesitated —" the pulling up of an entire people — it is colossal."

" But I am not English," said Sara Lee. " And I have a little money. I want to make soup for your wounded men at a railway station or — any place. I can make good soup. And I shall have money each month to buy what I need."

Only then was Sara Lee admitted to the crowded little room.

Long afterward, when the lights behind the back drop had gone down and Sara Lee was back again in her familiar setting, one of the clearest pictures she retained of that amazing interlude was of that crowded little room in the Savoy, its single littered desk, its two typewriters creating an incredible din, a large gentleman in a dark-blue military cape seeming to fill the room. And in corners and off stage, so to speak, perhaps a half dozen men, watching her curiously.

The conversation was in French, and Sara Lee's acquaintance of the passage acted as interpreter. It was only when Sara Lee found that a considerable discussion was going on in which she had no part that she looked round and saw her friend of two nights be-

fore and of the little donkey. He was watching her intently, and when he caught her eye he bowed.

Now men, in Sara Lee's mind, had until now been divided into the ones at home, one's own kind, the sort who married one's friends or oneself, the kind who called their wives "mother" after the first baby came, and were easily understood, plain men, decent and God-fearing and self-respecting; and the men of that world outside America, who were foreigners. One might like foreigners, but they were outsiders.

So there was no self-consciousness in Sara Lee's bow and smile. Later on Henri was to find that lack of self and sex consciousness one of the maddening mysteries about Sara Lee. Perhaps he never quite understood it. But always he respected it.

More conversation, in an increasing staccato. Short contributions from the men crowded into corners. Frenzied beating of the typewriting machines, and overhead and far away the band. There was no air in the room. Sara Lee was to find out a great deal later on about the contempt of the Belgians for air. She loosened Aunt Harriet's neckpiece.

So far Henri had not joined in the discussion. But now he came forward and spoke. Also, having finished, he interpreted to Sara Lee.

"They are most grateful," he explained. "It is a — a practical idea, mademoiselle. If you were in Belgium"— he smiled rather mirthlessly —"if you were already in the very small part of Belgium remaining to us, we could place you very usefully. But — the

British War Office is most careful, just now. You understand — there are reasons."

Sara Lee flushed indignantly.

"They can watch me if they want to," she said. "What trouble can I make? I've only just landed. You — you'd have to go a good ways to find any one who knows less than I do about the war."

"There is no doubt of that," he said, unconscious of offense. "But the War Office ——" He held out his hands.

Sara Lee, who had already caught the British "a" and was rather overdoing it, had a wild impulse to make the same gesture. It meant so much.

More conversation. Evidently more difficulties — but with Henri now holding the center of the stage and speaking rapidly. The heavy-set man retired and read letters under an electric lamp. The band upstairs was having dinner. And Henri argued and wrangled. He was quite passionate. The man in the military cape listened and smiled. And at last he nodded.

Henri turned to Sara Lee.

"You Americans are all brave," he said. "You like — what is it you say? — taking a chance, I think. Would you care to take such a chance?"

"What sort of a chance?"

"May I visit you this evening at your hotel?"

Just for an instant Sara Lee hesitated. There was Harvey at home. He would not like her receiving a call from any man. And Harvey did not like foreigners. He always said they had no respect for women.

It struck her suddenly what Harvey would call Henri's bowing and his kissing her hand, and his passionate gesticulations when he was excited. He would call it all tomfool nonsense.

And she recalled his final words, his arms so close about her that she could hardly breathe, his voice husky with emotion.

"Just let me hear of any of those foreigners bothering you," he said, "and I'll go over and wipe out the whole damned nation."

It had not sounded funny then. It was not funny now.

"Please come," said Sara Lee in a small voice.

The other gentlemen bowed profoundly. Sara Lee, rather at a loss, gave them a friendly smile that included them all. And then she and Henri were walking up the stairs and to the entrance, Henri's tall figure the target for many women's eyes. He, however, saw no one but Sara Lee.

Henri, too, called a taxicab. Every one in London seemed to ride in taxis. And he bent over her hand, once she was in the car, but he did not kiss it.

"It is very kind of you, what you are doing," he said. "But, then, you Americans are all kind. And wonderful."

Back at Morley's Hotel Sara Lee had a short conversation with Harvey's picture.

"You are entirely wrong, dear," she said. She was brushing her hair at the time, and it is rather a pity that it was a profile picture and that Harvey's pictured

eyes were looking off into space — that is, a piece of white canvas on a frame, used by photographers to reflect the light into the eyes. For Sara Lee with her hair down was even lovelier than with it up. "You were wrong. They are different, but they are kind and polite. And very, very respectful. And he is coming on business."

She intended at first to make no change in her frock. After all, it was not a social call, and if she did not dress it would put things on the right footing.

But slipping along the corridor after her bath, clad in a kimono and slippers and extremely nervous, she encountered a young woman on her way to dinner, and she was dressed in that combination of street skirt and evening blouse that some Englishwomen from the outlying districts still affect. And Sara Lee thereupon decided to dress. She called in the elderly maid, who was already her slave, and together they went over her clothes.

It was the maid, perhaps, then who brought into Sara Lee's life the strange and mad infatuation for her that was gradually to become a dominant issue in the next few months. For the maid chose a white dress, a soft and young affair in which Sara Lee looked like the heart of a rose.

"I always like to see a young lady in white, miss," said the maid. "Especially when there's a healthy skin."

So Sara Lee ate her dinner alone, such a dinner as a healthy skin and body demanded. And she

watched tall young Englishwomen with fine shoulders go out with English officers in khaki, and listened to a babel of high English voices, and — felt extremely alone and very subdued.

Henri came rather late. It was one of the things she was to learn about him later — that he was frequently late. It was only long afterward that she realized that such time as he spent with her was gained only at the cost of almost superhuman effort. But that was when she knew Henri's story, and his work. She waited for him in the reception room, where a man and a woman were having coffee and talking in a strange tongue. Henri found her there, at something before nine, rather downcast and worried, and debating about going up to bed. She looked up, to find him bowing before her.

"I thought you were not coming," she said.

"I? Not come? But I had said that I would come, mademoiselle. I may sit down?"

Sara Lee moved over on the velvet sofa, and Henri lowered his long body onto it. Lowered his voice, too, for the man and woman were staring at him.

"I'm afraid I didn't quite understand about this afternoon," began Sara Lee. "You spoke about taking a chance. I am not afraid of danger, if that is what you mean."

"That, and a little more, mademoiselle," said Henri. "But — now that I am here I do not know."

His eyes were keen. Sara Lee had suddenly a strange feeling that he was watching the couple who

talked over their coffee, and that, oddly enough, the couple were watching him. Yet he was apparently giving his undivided attention to her.

"Have you walked any to-day?" he asked her unexpectedly.

Sara Lee remembered the bus, and, with some bitterness, the two taxis.

"I haven't had a chance to walk," she said.

"But you should walk," he said. "I — will you walk with me? Just about the square, for air?" And in a lower tone: "It is not necessary that those two should know the plan, mademoiselle."

"I'll get my coat and hat," Sara Lee said, and proceeded to do so in a brisk and businesslike fashion. When she came down Henri was emerging from the telephone booth. His face was impassive. And again when in time Sara Lee was to know Henri's face better than she had ever known Harvey's, she was to learn that the masklike look he sometimes wore meant danger — for somebody.

They went out without further speech into the clear cold night. Henri, as if from custom, threw his head back and scanned the sky. Then they went on and crossed into the square.

"The plan," Henri began abruptly, "is this: You will be provided to-morrow with a passport to Boulogne. You will, if you agree, take the midnight train for Folkestone. At the railway station here you will be searched. At Folkestone a board, sitting in an office on the quay, will examine your passport."

"Does any one in Boulogne speak English?" Sara Lee inquired nervously. Somehow that babel of French at the Savoy had frightened her. Her little phrase book seemed pitifully inadequate for the great things in her mind.

"That hardly matters," said Henri, smiling faintly. "Because I think you shall not go to Boulogne."

"Not go!" She stopped dead, under the monument, and looked up at him.

"The place for you to go, to start from, is Calais," Henri explained. He paused, to let pass two lovers, a man in khaki and a girl. "But Calais is difficult. It is under martial law — a closed city. From Boulogne to Calais would be perhaps impossible."

Sara Lee was American and her methods were direct.

"How can I get to Calais?"

"Will you take the chance I spoke of?"

"For goodness' sake," said Sara Lee in an exasperated tone, "how can I tell you until I know what it is?"

Henri told her. He even, standing under a street lamp, drew a small sketch for her, to make it clear. Sara Lee stood close, watching him, and some of the lines were not as steady as they might have been. And in the midst of it he suddenly stopped.

"Do you know what it means?" he demanded.

"Yes, of course."

"And you know what date this is?"

"The eighteenth of February."

But he saw, after all, that she did not entirely understand.

"To-night, this eighteenth of February, the Germans commence a blockade of this coast. No vessels, if they can prevent them, will leave the harbors; or if they do, none shall reach the other side!"

"Oh!" said Sara Lee blankly.

"We are eager to do as you wish, mademoiselle. But"— he commenced slowly to tear up the sketch — "it is too dangerous. You are too young. If anything should go wrong and I had —— No. We will find another way."

He put the fragments of the sketch in his pocket.

"How long is this blockade to last?" Sara Lee asked out of bitter disappointment.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can say? A week! A year! Not at all!"

"Then," said Sara Lee with calm deliberation, "you might as well get out your pencil and draw another picture — because I'm going."

Far enough away now, the little house at home and the peace that dwelt therein; and Harvey; and the small white bedroom; and the daily round of quiet duties. Sara Lee had set her face toward the east, and the land of dying men. And as Henri looked down at her she had again that poised and eager look, almost of flight, that had brought into Harvey's love for her just a touch of fear.

VI

SARA LEE KENNEDY was up at dawn the next morning. There was a very serious matter to decide, for Henri's plan had included only such hand luggage as she herself could carry.

Sara Lee carefully laid out on the bed such articles as she could not possibly do without, and was able to pack into her suitcase less than a fourth of them. She had fortunately brought a soft wool sweater, which required little room. Undergarments, several blouses, the sweater and a pair of heavy shoes — that was her equipment, plus such small toilet outfit as is necessary when a young woman uses no make-up and regards cold cream only as a remedy for chapped hands.

The maid found her in rather a dismal mood.

"Going across, miss!" she said. "Fancy that!"

"It's a secret," cautioned Sara Lee. "I am really not sure I am going. I am only trying to go."

The maid, who found Sara Lee and the picture of Harvey on her dressing table both romantic and appealing, offered to pack. From the first moment it was evident that she meant to include the white dress. Indeed she packed it first.

"You never know what's going to happen over there," she asserted. "They do say that royalties are everywhere, going about like common people. You'd better have a good frock with you."

She had an air of subdued excitement, and after she

had established the fact that not only the white frock but slippers and hose also would go in she went to the door and glanced up and down the passage. Then she closed the door.

"There was queer goings-on here last night, miss," she said cautiously. "Spies!"

"Oh, no!" cried Sara Lee.

"Spies," she repeated. "A man and a woman, pretending to be Belgian refugees. They took them away at daylight. I expect by now they've been shot."

Sara Lee ate very little breakfast that morning. All through England it was confidently believed that spies were shot on discovery, a theory that has been persistent — and false, save at the battle line — since the beginning of the war. And Henri's plan assumed new proportions. Suppose she made her attempt and failed? Suppose they took her for a spy, and that to-morrow's sun found her facing a firing squad? Not, indeed, that she had ever heard of a firing squad, as such. But she had seen spies shot in the movies. They invariably stood in front of a brick wall, with the hero in the center.

So she absent-mindedly ate her kippered herring, which had been strongly recommended by the waiter, and tried to think of what a spy would do, so she might avoid any suspicious movements. It struck her, too, that war seemed to have made the people on that side of the ocean extremely ready with weapons. They would be quite likely to shoot first and ask questions afterwards — which would be too late to be helpful.

She remembered Henri, for instance, and the way, without a word, he had shot the donkey.

That day she wrote Harvey a letter.

"*Dearest:*" it began; "I think I am to leave for France to-night. Things seem to be moving nicely, and I am being helped by the Belgian Relief Commission. It is composed of Belgians and is at the Savoy Hotel."

Here she stopped and cried a little. What if she should never see Harvey again — never have his sturdy arms about her? Harvey gained by distance. She remembered only his unfailing kindness and strength and his love for her. He seemed, here at the edge of the whirlpool, a sort of eddy of peace and quiet. Even then she had no thought of going back until her work was done, but she did an unusual thing for her, unused to demonstration of any sort. She kissed his ring.

Followed directions about sending the money from the church society, a description of Morley's and Trafalgar Square, an account of tea at the Travers', and of the little donkey — without mention, however, of Henri. She felt that Harvey would not understand Henri.

But at the end came the passage which poor Harvey read and re-read when the letter came, and alternately ground his teeth over and kissed.

"I do love you, Harvey dear. And I am coming back to you. I have felt that I had to do what I am

doing, but I am coming back. That's a promise. Unless, of course, I should take sick, or something like that, which isn't likely."

There was a long pause in the writing here, but Harvey could not know that.

"I shall wear your ring always; and always, Harvey, it will mean to me that I belong to you. With dearest love.

"SARA LEE."

Then she added a postscript, of course.

"The War Office is not letting people cross to Calais just now. But I am going to do it anyhow. It is perfectly simple. And when I get over I shall write and tell you how.

"S. L."

It was the next day that an indignant official in the censor's office read that postscript, and rose in his wrath and sent a third Undersomething-or-other to look up Sara Lee at Morley's. But by this time she was embarked on the big adventure; and by the time a cable reached Calais there was no trace of Sara Lee.

During the afternoon she called up Mr. Travers at his office, and rather gathered that he did not care to use the telephone during business hours.

"I just wanted to tell you that you need not bother

about me any more," she said. "I am being sent over, and I think everything is all right."

He was greatly relieved. Mrs. Travers had not fully indorsed his encomiums of the girl. She had felt that no really nice girl would travel so far on so precarious an errand, particularly when she was alone. And how could one tell, coming from America, how her sympathies really lay? She might be of German parentage — the very worst sort, because they spoke American. It was easy enough to change a name.

Nevertheless, Mr. Travers felt a trifle low in his mind when he hung up the receiver. He said twice to himself: "Twenty pounds!" And at last he put four sovereigns in an envelope and sent them to her anonymously by messenger. Sara Lee guessed whence they came, but she respected the manner of the gift and did not thank him. It was almost the first gold money she had ever seen.

She was very carefully searched at the railway station that night and found that her American Red Cross button, which had come with her dollar subscription to the association, made the matron inspector rather kindly inclined. Nevertheless, she took off Sara Lee's shoes, and ran over the lining of her coat, and quite ruined the maid's packing of the suitcase.

"You are going to Boulogne?" asked the matron inspector.

Sara Lee did not like to lie.

"Wherever the boat takes me," she said with a smile.

The matron smiled too.

"I shouldn't be nervous, miss," she said. "It's a chance, of course, but they have not done much damage yet."

It was after midnight then, and a cold fog made the station a gloomy thing of blurred yellow lights and raw chill. A few people moved about, mostly officers in uniform. Half a dozen men in civilian clothes eyed her as she passed through the gates; Scotland Yard, but she did not know. And once she thought she saw Henri, but he walked away into the shadows and disappeared. The train, looking as absurdly small and light as all English trains do, was waiting out in the shed. There were no porters, and Sara Lee carried her own bag.

She felt quite sure she had been mistaken about Henri, for of course he would have come and carried it for her.

The train was cold and quiet. When it finally moved out it was under way before she knew that it was going. And then suddenly Sara Lee's heart began to pound hard.

It was a very cold and shivering Sara Lee who curled up, alone in her compartment, and stared hard at Harvey's ring to keep her courage up. But a curious thing had happened. Harvey gave her no moral support. He brought her only disapproval. She found herself remembering none of the loving things he had said to her, but only the bitter ones.

Perhaps it was the best thing for her, after all. For

a sort of dogged determination to go through with it all, at any cost, braced her to her final effort.

So far it had all been busy enough, but not comfortable. She was cold, and she had eaten almost nothing all day. As the hours went on and the train slid through the darkness she realized that she was rather faint. The steam pipes, only warm at the start, were entirely cold by one o'clock, and by two Sara Lee was sitting on her feet, with a heavy coat wrapped about her knees.

The train moved quietly, as do all English trains, with no jars and little sound. There were few lights outside, for the towns of Eastern England were darkened, like London, against air attacks. So when she looked at the window she saw only her own reflection, white and wide-eyed, above Aunt Harriet's fur neckpiece.

In the next compartment an officer was snoring, but she did not close her eyes. Perhaps, for that last hour, some of the glow that had brought her so far failed her. She was not able to think beyond Folkestone, save occasionally, and that with a feeling that it should not be made so difficult to do a kind and helpful thing.

At a quarter before three the train eased down. In the same proportion Sara Lee's pulse went up. A long period of crawling along, a stop or two, but no resultant opening of the doors; and at last, in a cold rain and a howling wind from the channel, the little seaport city.

More officers than she had suspected, a few women,

got out. The latter Sara Lee's experience on the steamer enabled her to place; buyers mostly, and Americans, on their way to Paris, blockade or no blockade, because the American woman must be well and smartly gowned and hatted. A man with a mourning band on his sleeve carried a wailing child.

The officers lighted cigarettes. The civilians formed a line on the jetty under the roof of the shed, and waited, passports in hand, before a door that gleamed with yellow light. Faces looked pale and anxious. The blockade was on, and Germany had said that no ships would cross that night.

As if defiantly the Boulogne boat, near at hand, was ablaze, on the shore side at least, with lights. Stewards came and went. Beyond it lay the harbor, dark and mysterious save where, from somewhere across, a flashlight made a brave effort to pierce the fog.

One of the buyers ahead of Sara Lee seemed exhilarated by the danger ahead.

"They'll never get us," she said. "Look at that fog!"

"It's lifting, dearie," answered a weary voice behind her. "The wind is carrying it away."

When Sara Lee's turn came she was ready. A group of men in civilian clothes, seated about a long table, looked her over carefully. Her passports moved deliberately from hand to hand. A long business, and the baby wailing harder than ever. But the office was at least warm. Some of her failing courage came back as she moved, following her papers, round

the table. They were given back to her at last, and she went out. She had passed the first ordeal.

Suitcase in hand she wandered down the stone jetty. The Boulogne boat she passed, and kept on. At the very end, dark and sinister, lay another boat. It had no lights. The tide was in, and its deck lay almost flush with the pier. Sara Lee walked on toward it until a voice spoke to her out of the darkness and near at hand.

"Your boat is back there, madam."

"I know. Thank you. I am just walking about."

The petty officer — he was a petty officer, though Sara Lee had never heard the term — was inclined to be suspicious. Under excuse of lighting his pipe he struck a match, and Sara Lee's young figure stood out in full relief. His suspicions died away with the flare.

"Bad night, miss," he offered.

"Very," said Sara Lee, and turned back again.

This time, bewildered and uneasy, she certainly saw Henri. But he ignored her. He was alone, and smoking one of his interminable cigarettes. He had not said he was crossing, and why had he not spoken to her? He wandered past down the pier, and she lost him in the shadows. When he came back he paused near her, and at last saluted and spoke.

"*Pardon,*" he said. "If you will stand back here you will find less wind."

"Thank you."

He carried her suitcase back, and stooping over to place it at her feet he said: "I shall send him on

board with a message to the captain. When I come back try again."

He left her at once. The passengers for Boulogne were embarking now. A silent lot, they disappeared into the warmth and brightness of the little boat and were lost. No one paid any attention to Sara Lee standing in the shadows.

Soon Henri came back. He walked briskly and touched his cap as he passed. He went aboard the Boulogne steamer, and without a backward glance disappeared.

Sara Lee watched him out of sight, in a very real panic. He had been something real and tangible in that shadowy place — something familiar in an unfamiliar world. But he was gone. She threw up her head.

So once more Sara Lee picked up her suitcase and went down the pier. Now she was unchallenged. What lurking figure might be on the dark deck of the Calais boat she could not tell. That was the chance she was to take. The gangway was still out, and as quietly as possible she went aboard. The Boulogne boat had suddenly gone dark, and she heard the churning of the screw. With the extinction of the lights on the other boat came at last deeper night to her aid. A few steps, a stumble, a gasp — and she was on board the forbidden ship.

She turned forward, according to her instructions, where the overhead deck made below an even deeper shadow. Henri had said that there were cabins there,

and that the chance was of finding an unlocked one. If they were all locked she would be discovered at dawn, and arrested. And Sara Lee was not a war correspondent. She was not accustomed to arrest. Indeed she had a deep conviction that arrest in her case would mean death. False, of course, but surely it shows her courage.

As she stood there, breathless and listening, the Boulogne boat moved out. She heard the wash against the jetty, felt the rolling of its waves. But being on the landward side she could not see the faint gleam of a cigarette that marked Henri's anxious figure at the rail. So long as the black hulk of the Calais boat was visible, and long after indeed, Henri stood there, outwardly calm but actually shaken by many fears. She had looked so small and young; and who could know what deviltry lurked abroad that night?

He had not gone with her because it was necessary that he be in Boulogne the next morning. And also, the very chance of getting her across lay in her being alone and unobserved.

So he stood by the rail and looked back and said a wordless little prayer that if there was trouble it come to his boat and not to the other. Which might very considerably have disturbed the buyers had they known of it and believed in prayer.

Sara Lee stood in the shadows and listened. There were voices overhead, from the bridge. A door opened onto the deck and threw out a ray of light. Some one came out and went on shore, walking with

brisk ringing steps. And then at last she put down her bag and tried door after door, without result.

The man who had gone ashore called another. The gangway was drawn in. The engines began to vibrate underfoot. Sara Lee, breathless and terrified, stood close to a cabin door and remained immovable. At one moment it seemed as if a seaman was coming forward to where she stood. But he did not come.

The Calais boat was waiting until the other steamer had got well out of the harbor. The fog had lifted, and the searchlight was moving over the surface. It played round the channel steamer without touching it. But none of this was visible to Sara Lee.

At last the lights of the quay began to recede. The little boat rocked slightly in its own waves as it edged away. It moved slowly through the shipping and out until, catching the swell of the channel, it shot ahead at top speed.

For an hour Sara Lee stood there. The channel wind caught her and tore at her skirts until she was almost frozen. And finally, in sheer desperation, she worked her way round to the other side. She saw no one. Save for the beating heart of the engine below it might have been a dead ship.

On the other side she found an open door and stumbled into the tiny dark deck cabin, as chilled and frightened a philanthropist as had ever crossed that old and tricky and soured bit of seaway. And there, to be frank, she forgot her fright in as bitter a tribute of seasickness as even the channel has ever exacted.

She had locked herself in, and she fell at last into an exhausted sleep. When she wakened and peered out through the tiny window it was gray winter dawn. The boat was quiet, and before her lay the quay of Calais and the Gare Maritime. A gangway was out and a hurried survey showed no one in sight.

Sara Lee picked up her suitcase and opened the door. The fresh morning air revived her, but nevertheless it was an extremely pale young woman who, obeying Henri's instructions, went ashore that morning in the gray dawn unseen, undisturbed and unqestioned. But from the moment she appeared on the gangway until the double glass doors of the Gare Maritime closed behind her this apparently calm young woman did not breathe at all. She arrived, indeed, with lungs fairly collapsed and her heart entirely unreliable.

A woman clerk was asleep at a desk. Sara Lee roused her to half wakefulness, no interest and extremely poor English. A drowsy porter led her up a staircase and down an endless corridor. Then at last he was gone, and Sara Lee turned the key in her door and burst into tears.

VII

NOW up to this point Sara Lee's mind had come to rest at Calais. She must get there; after that the other things would need to be worried over. Henri had already in their short acquaintance installed himself as the central figure of this strange and amazing interlude — not as a good-looking young soldier surprisingly fertile in expedients, but as a sort of agent of providence, by whom and through whom things were done.

And Henri had said she was to go to the Gare Maritime at Calais and make herself comfortable — if she got there. After that things would be arranged.

Sara Lee therefore took a hot bath, though hardly a satisfactory one, for there was no soap and she had brought none. She learned later on to carry soap with her everywhere. So she soaked the chill out of her slim body and then dressed. The room was cold, but a great exultation kept her warm. She had run the blockade, she had escaped the War Office — which, by the way, was looking her up almost violently by that time, via the censor. It had found the trunk she left at Morley's, and cross-questioned the maid into hysteria — and here she was, safe in France, the harbor of Calais before her, and here and there strange-looking war craft taking on coal. Destroyers, she learned later. Her ignorance was rather appalling at first.

It was all unreal — the room with its cold steam pipes, the heavy window hangings, the very words on the hot and cold taps in the bathroom. A great vessel moved into the harbor. As it turned she saw its name printed on its side in huge letters, and the flag, also painted, of a neutral country — a hoped-for protection against German submarines. It brought home to her, rather, the thing she had escaped.

After a time she thought of food, but rather hopelessly. Her attempts to get *savon* from a stupid boy had produced nothing more useful than a flow of unintelligible French and no soap whatever. She tried a pantomime of washing her hands, but to the boy she had appeared to be merely wringing them. And, as a great many females were wringing their hands in France those days, he had gone away, rather sorry for her.

When hunger drove her to the bell again he came back and found her with her little phrase book in her hands, feverishly turning the pages. She could find plenty of sentences such as "*Garçon, vous avez renversé du vin sur ma robe,*" but not an egg lifted its shining pate above the pages. Not cereal. Not fruit. Not even the word breakfast.

Long, long afterward Sara Lee found a quite delightful breakfast hidden between two pages that were stuck together. But it was then far too late.

"*Donnez-moi,*" began Sara Lee, and turned the pages rapidly, "this; do you see?" She had found roast beef.

The boy observed stolidly, in French, that it was not ready until noon. She was able to make out, from his failing to depart, that there was no roast beef.

"Good gracious!" she said, ravenous and exasperated. "Go and get me some bread and coffee, anyhow." She repeated it, slightly louder.

That was the tableau that Henri found when, after a custom that may be war or may be Continental, he had inquired the number of her room and made his way there.

There was a twinkle in his blue eyes as he bowed before her — and a vast relief too.

"So you are here!" he said in a tone of satisfaction.

He had put in an extremely bad night, even for him, by whom nights were seldom wasted in a bed. While he was with her something of her poise had communicated itself to him. He had felt the confidence, in men and affairs, that American girls are given as a birthright. And her desire for service he had understood as a year or two ago he could not have understood. But he had stood by the rail staring north, and cursing himself for having placed her in danger during the entire crossing.

There was nothing about him that morning, however, to show his bad hours. He was debonnaire and smiling.

"I am famishing," said Sara Lee. "And there are no eggs in this book — none whatever."

"Eggs! You wish eggs?"

"I just want food. Almost anything will do. I asked for eggs because they can come quickly."

Henri turned to the boy and sent him off with a rapid order. Then: "May I come in?" he said.

Sara Lee cast an uneasy glance over the room. It was extremely tidy, and unmistakably it was a bedroom. But though her color rose she asked him in. After all, what did it matter? To have refused would have looked priggish, she said to herself. And as a matter of fact one of the early lessons she learned in France was learned that morning — that though convention had had to go, like many other things in the war, men who were gentlemen ignored its passing.

Henri came in and stood by the center table.

"Now, please tell me," he said. "I have been most uneasy. On the quay last night you looked — frightened."

"I was awfully frightened. Nothing happened. I even slept."

"You were very brave."

"I was very seasick."

"I am sorry."

Henri took a turn up and down the room.

"But," said Sara Lee slowly, "I — I — can't be on your hands, you know. You must have many things to do. If you are going to have to order my meals and all that, I'm going to be a dreadful burden."

"But you will learn very quickly."

"I'm stupid about languages."

Henri dismissed that with a gesture. She could not, he felt, be stupid about anything. He went to the window and looked out. The destroyers were still coaling, and a small cargo was being taken off the boat at the quay. The rain was over, and in the early sunlight an officer in blue tunic, red breeches and black cavalry boots was taking the air, his head bent over his chest. Not a detail of the scene escaped him.

"I have agreed to find the right place for you," he said thoughtfully. "There is one, but I think ——" He hesitated. "I do not wish to place you again in danger."

"You mean that it is near the Front?"

"Very near, mademoiselle."

"But I should be rather near, to be useful."

"Perhaps, for your work. But what of you? These brutes — they shell far and wide. One can never be sure."

He paused and surveyed her whimsically.

"Who allowed you to come, alone, like this?" he demanded. "Is there no one who objected?"

Sara Lee glanced down at her ring.

"The man I am going to marry. He is very angry."

Henri looked at her, and followed her eyes to Harvey's ring. He said nothing, however, but he went over and gave the bell cord a violent jerk.

"You must have food quickly," he said in a rather flat voice. "You are looking tired and pale."

A sense of unreality was growing on Sara Lee.

That she should be alone in France with a man she had never seen three days before; that she knew nothing whatever about that man; that, for the present at least, she was utterly and absolutely dependent on him, even for the food she ate — it was all of a piece with the night's voyage and the little room at the Savoy. And it was none of it real.

When the breakfast tray came Henri was again at the window and silent. And Sara Lee saw that it was laid for two. She was a little startled, but the businesslike way in which the young officer drew up two chairs and held one out for her made protest seem absurd. And the flat-faced boy, who waited, looked unshocked and uninterested.

It was not until she had had some coffee that Henri followed up his line of thought.

"So — the fiancé did not approve? It is not difficult to understand. There is always danger, for there are German aëroplanes even in remote places. And you are very young. You still wish to establish yourself, mademoiselle?"

"Of course!"

"Would it be a comfort to cable your safe arrival in France to the fiancé?" When he saw her face he smiled. And if it was a rather heroic smile it was none the less friendly. "I see. What shall I say? Or will you write it?"

So Sara Lee, vastly cheered by two cups of coffee, an egg, and a very considerable portion of bread and butter, wrote her cable. It was to be brief, for cables

cost money. It said, "Safe. Well. Love." And Henri, who seemed to have strange and ominous powers, sent it almost immediately. Total cost, as reported to Sara Lee, two francs. He took the money she offered him gravely.

"We shall cable quite often," he said. "He will be anxious. And I think he has a right to know."

The "we" was entirely unconscious.

"And now," he said, when he had gravely allowed Sara Lee to pay her half of the breakfast, "we must arrange to get you out of Calais. And that, mademoiselle, may take time."

It took time. Sara Lee, growing accustomed now to little rooms entirely filled with men and typewriters, went from one office to another, walking along the narrow pavements with Henri, through streets filled with soldiers. Once they drew aside to let pass a procession of Belgian refugees, those who had held to their village homes until bombardment had destroyed them — stout peasant women in short skirts and with huge bundles, old men, a few young ones, many children. The terror of the early flight was not theirs, but there was in all of them a sort of sodden hopelessness that cut Sara Lee to the heart. In an irregular column they walked along, staring ahead but seeing nothing. Even the children looked old and tired.

Sara Lee's eyes filled with tears.

"My people," said Henri. "Simple country folk, and going to England, where they will grieve for the things that are gone — their fields and their sons.

The old ones will die, quickly, of homesickness. It is difficult to transplant an old tree."

The final formalities seemed to offer certain difficulties. Henri, who liked to do things quickly and like a prince, flushed with irritation. He drew himself up rather haughtily in reply to one question, and glanced uneasily at the girl. But it was all as intelligible as Sanskrit to her.

It was only after a whispered sentence to the man at the head of the table that the paper was finally signed.

As they went down to the street together Sara Lee made a little protest.

"But I simply must not take all your time," she said, looking up anxiously. "I begin to realize how foolhardy the whole thing is. I meant well, but — it is you who are doing everything; not I."

"I shall not make the soup, mademoiselle," he replied gravely.

VIII

THERE were more things to do. Sara Lee's money must be exchanged at a bank for French gold. She had three hundred dollars, and it had been given her in a tiny brown canvas bag. And then there was the matter of going from Calais toward the Front. She had expected to find a train, but there were no trains. All cars were being used for troops. She stared at Henri in blank dismay.

"No trains!" she said blankly. "Would an automobile be very expensive?"

"They are all under government control, mademoiselle. Even the petrol."

She stopped in the street.

"Then I shall have to go back."

Henri laughed boyishly.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I have been requested to take you to a place where you may render us the service we so badly need. For the present that is my duty, and nothing else. So if you will accept the offer of my car, which is a shameful one but travels well, we can continue our journey."

Long, long afterward, Sara Lee found a snapshot of Henri's car, taken by a light-hearted British officer. Found it and sat for a long time with it in her hand, thinking and remembering that first day she saw it, in the sun at Calais. A long low car it was, once green, but now roughly painted gray. But it was not

the crude painting, significant as it was, that brought so close the thing she was going to. It was that the car was but a shell of a car. The mud guards were crumpled up against the side. Body and hood were pitted with shrapnel. A door had been shot away, and the wind shield was but a frame set round with broken glass. Even the soldier-chauffeur wore a patch over one eye, and his uniform was ragged.

"Not a beautiful car, mademoiselle, as I warned you! But a fast one!"

Henri was having a double enjoyment. He was watching Sara Lee's face and his chauffeur's remaining eye.

"But fast; eh, Jean?" he said to the chauffeur. The man nodded and said something in French. It was probably the thing Henri had hoped for, and he threw back his head and laughed.

"Jean is reminding me," he said gayly, "that it is forbidden to officers to take a lady along the road that we shall travel." But when he saw how Sara Lee flushed he turned to the man.

"Mademoiselle has come from America to help us, Jean," he said quietly. "And now for Dunkirk."

The road from Dunkirk to Calais was well guarded in those days. From Nieuport for some miles inland only the shattered remnant of the Belgian Army held the line. For the cry "On to Paris!" the Germans had substituted "On to Calais!"

So, on French soil at least, the road was well guarded. A few miles in the battered car, then a slow-

ing up, a showing of passports, the clatter of a great chain as it dropped to the road, a lowering of leveled rifles, and a salute from the officer — that was the method by which they advanced.

Henri sat with the driver and talked in a low tone. Sometimes he sat quiet, looking ahead. He seemed, somehow, older, more careworn. His boyishness had gone. Now and then he turned to ask if she was comfortable, but in the intervals she felt that he had entirely forgotten her. Once, at something Jean said, he got out a pocket map and went over it carefully. It was a long time after that before he turned to see if she was all right.

Sara Lee sat forward and watched everything. She saw little evidence of war, beyond the occasional sentries and chains. Women were walking along the roads. Children stopped and pointed, smiling, at the battered car. One very small boy saluted, and Henri as gravely returned the salute.

Some time after that he turned to her.

"I find that I shall have to leave you in Dunkirk," he said. "A matter of a day only, probably. But I will see before I go that you are comfortable."

"I shall be quite all right, of course."

But something had gone out of the day for her.

Sara Lee learned one thing that day, learned it as some women do learn, by the glance of an eye, the tone of a voice. The chauffeur adored Henri. His one unbandaged eye stole moments from the road to glance at him. When he spoke, while Henri read his map,

his very voice betrayed him. And while she pondered the thing, woman-fashion, they drew into the square of Dunkirk, where the statue of Jean Bart, pirate and privateer, stared down at this new procession of war which passed daily and nightly under his cold eyes.

Jean and a porter carried in her luggage. Henri and a voluble and smiling Frenchwoman showed her to her room. She felt like an island of silence in a rapid-rolling sea of French. The Frenchwoman threw open the door.

A great room with high curtained windows; a huge bed with a faded gilt canopy and heavy draperies; a wardrobe as vast as the bed; and for a toilet table an enormous mirror reaching to the ceiling and with a marble shelf below — that was her room.

"I think you will be comfortable here, mademoiselle."

Sara Lee, who still clutched her small bag of gold, shook her head.

"Comfortable, yes," she said. "But I am afraid it is very expensive."

Henri named an extremely low figure — an exact fourth, to be accurate, of its real cost. A surprising person, Henri, with his worn uniform and his capacity for kindly mendacity. And seeing something in the Frenchwoman's face that perhaps he had expected, he turned to her almost fiercely:

"You are to understand, madame, that this lady has been placed in my care by authority that will not be questioned. She is to have every deference."

That was all, but was enough. And from that time on Sara Lee Kennedy, of Ohio, was called, in the tiny box downstairs which constituted the office, "Mademoiselle La Princesse."

Henri did a characteristic and kindly thing for Sara Lee before he left that evening on one of the many mysterious journeys that he was to make during the time Sara Lee knew him. He came to her door, menus in hand, and painstakingly ordered for her a dinner for that night, and the three meals for the day following.

He made no suggestion of dining with her that evening. Indeed watching him from her small table Sara Lee decided that he had put her entirely out of his mind. He did not so much as glance at her. Save the cashier at her boxed-in desk and money drawer, she was the only woman in that room full of officers. Quite certainly Henri was the only man who did not find some excuse for glancing in her direction.

But finishing early, he paused by the cashier's desk to pay for his meal, and then he gave Sara Lee the stiffest and most ceremonious of bows.

She felt hurt. Alone in her great room, the curtains drawn by order of the police, lest a ray of light betray the town to eyes in the air, she went carefully over the hours she had spent with Henri that day, looking for a cause of offense. She must have hurt him or he would surely have stopped to speak to her.

Perhaps already he was finding her a burden. She flushed with shame when she remembered about the

meals he had had to order for her, and she sat up in her great bed until late, studying by candlelight such phrases as:

" Il y a une erreur dans la note," and *" Garçon, quels fruits avez-vous? "*

She tried to write to Harvey that night, but she gave it up at last. There was too much he would not understand. She could not write frankly without telling of Henri, and to this point everything had centered about Henri. It all rather worried her, because there was nothing she was ashamed of, nothing she should have had to conceal. She had yet to learn, had Sara Lee, that many of the concealments of life are based not on wrongdoing but on fear of misunderstanding.

So she got as far as: *" Dearest Harvey:* I am here in a hotel at Dunkirk "— and then stopped, fairly engulfed in a wave of homesickness. Not so much for Harvey as for familiar things — Uncle James in his chair by the fire, with the phonograph playing " My Little Gray Home in the West "; her own white bedroom; the sun on the red geraniums in the dining-room window: the voices of happy children wandering home from school.

She got up and went to the window, first blowing out the candle. Outside, the town lay asleep, and from a gate in the old wall a sentry with a bugle blew a quiet " All's well." From somewhere near, on top of the *mairie* perhaps, where eyes all night searched the sky for danger, came the same trumpet call of safety for the time, of a little longer for quiet sleep.

For two days the girl was alone. There was no sign of Henri. She had nothing to read, and her eyes, watching hour after hour the panorama that passed through the square under her window, searched vainly for his battered gray car. In daytime the panorama was chiefly of motor lorries — she called them trucks — piled high with supplies, often fodder for the horses in that vague district beyond ammunition and food. Now and then a battery rumbled through, its gunners on the limbers, detached, with folded arms; and always there were soldiers.

Sometimes, from her window, she saw the market people below, in their striped red-and-white booths, staring up at the sky. She would look up, too, and there would be an aëroplane sliding along, sometimes so low that one could hear the faint report of the exhaust.

But it was the ambulances that Sara Lee looked for. Mostly they came at night, a steady stream of them. Sometimes they moved rapidly. Again one would be going very slowly, and other machines would circle impatiently round it and go on. A silent, grim procession in the moonlight it was, and it helped the girl to bear the solitude of those two interminable days.

Inside those long gray cars with the red crosses painted on the tops — a symbol of mercy that had ceased to protect — inside those cars were wounded men, men who had perhaps lain for hours without food or care. Surely, surely it was right that she had

come. The little she could do must count in the great total. She twisted Harvey's ring on her finger and sent a little message to him.

"You will forgive me when you know, dear," was the message. "It is so terrible! So pitiful!"

Yet during the day the square was gay enough. Officers in spurs clanked across, wide capes blowing in the wind. Common soldiers bought fruit and paper bags of fried potatoes from the booths. Countless dogs fought under the feet of passers-by, and over all leered the sardonic face of Jean Bart, pirate and privateer.

Sara Lee went out daily, but never far. And she practiced French with the maid, after this fashion:

"*Draps de toile,*" said the smiling maid, putting the linen sheets on the bed.

Sara Lee would repeat it some six times.

"*Taies d'oreiller,*" when the pillows came. So Sara Lee called pillows by the name of their slips from that time forward! Came a bright hour when she rang the bell for the boy and asked for matches, which she certainly did not need, with entire success.

On the second night Sara Lee slept badly. At two o'clock she heard a sound in the hall, and putting on her kimono, opened the door. On a stiff chair outside, snoring profoundly, sat Jean, fully dressed.

The light from her candle roused him and he was wide awake in an instant.

"Why, Jean!" she said. "Isn't there any place for you to sleep?"

"I am to remain here, mademoiselle," he replied in English.

"But surely — not because of me?"

"It is the captain's order," he said briefly.

"I don't understand. Why?"

"All sorts of people come to this place, mademoiselle. But few ladies. It is best that I remain here."

She could not move him. He had remained standing while she spoke to him, and now he yawned, striving to conceal it. Sara Lee felt very uncomfortable, but Jean's attitude and voice alike were firm. She thanked him and said good night, but she slept little after that.

Lying there in the darkness, a warm glow of gratitude to Henri, and a feeling of her safety in his care, wrapped her like a mantle. She wondered drowsily if Harvey would ever have thought of all the small things that seemed second nature to this young Belgian officer.

She rather thought not.

IX

WHILE she was breakfasting the next morning there was a tap at the door, and thinking it the maid she called to her to come in.

But it was Jean, an anxious Jean, twisting his cap in his hands.

"You have had a message from the captain, mademoiselle?"

"No, Jean."

"He was to have returned during the night. He has not come, mademoiselle."

Sara Lee forgot her morning negligée in Jean's harassed face.

"But — where did he go?"

Jean shrugged his shoulders and did not reply.

"Are you worried about him?"

"I am anxious, mademoiselle. But I am often anxious; and — he always returns."

He smiled almost sheepishly. Sara Lee, who had no subtlety but a great deal of intuition, felt that there was a certain relief in the smile, as though Jean, having had no message from his master, was pleased that she had none. Which was true enough, at that. Also she felt that Jean's one eye was inspecting her closely, which was also true. A new factor had come into Henri's life — by Jean's reasoning, a new and dangerous one. And there were dangers enough already.

Highly dangerous, Jean reflected in the back of his head as he backed out with a bow. A young girl unafraid of the morning sun and sitting at a little breakfast table as fresh as herself — that was a picture for a war-weary man.

Jean forgot for a moment his anxiety for Henri's safety in his fear for his peace of mind. For a doubt had been removed. The girl was straight. Jean's one sophisticated eye had grasped that at once. A good girl, alone, and far from home! And Henri, like all soldiers, woman-hungry for good women, for unpainted skins and clear eyes and the freshness and bloom of youth.

All there, behind that little breakfast table which might so pleasantly have been laid for two.

Jean took a walk that morning, and stood staring for twenty minutes into a clock maker's window, full of clocks. After which he drew out his watch and looked at the time!

At two in the afternoon Sara Lee saw Henri's car come into the square. It was, if possible, more dilapidated than before, and he came like a gray whirlwind, scattering people and dogs out of his way. Almost before he had had time to enter the hotel Sara Lee heard him in the hall, and the next moment he was bowing before her.

"I have been longer than I expected," he explained. "Have you been quite comfortable?"

Sara Lee, however, was gazing at him with startled eyes. He was dirty, unshaven and his eyes looked

hollow and bloodshot. From his neck to his heels he was smeared with mud, and his tidy tunic was torn into ragged holes.

"But you — you have been fighting!" she gasped.

"I? No, mademoiselle. There has been no battle." His eyes left her and traveled over the room. "They are doing everything for you? They are attentive?"

"Everything is splendid," said Sara Lee. "If you won't tell me how you got into that condition, at least you can send your coat down to me to mend."

"My tunic!" He looked at it smilingly. "You would do that?"

"I am nearly frantic for something to do."

He smiled, and suddenly bending down he took her hand and kissed it.

"You are not only very beautiful, mademoiselle, but you are very good."

He went away then, and Sara Lee got out her sewing things. The tunic came soon, carefully brushed and very ragged. But it was not Jean who brought it; it was the Flemish boy.

And upstairs in a small room with two beds Sara Lee might have been surprised to find Jean, the chauffeur, lying on one, while Henri shaved himself beside the other. For Jean, of the ragged uniform and the patch over one eye, was a count of Belgium, and served Henri because he loved him. And because, too, he was no longer useful in that little army where lay his heart.

Sometime a book will be written about the Jeans of

this war, the great friendships it has brought forth between men. And not the least of its stories will be that of this Jean of the one eye. But its place is not here.

And perhaps there will be a book about the Henris, also. But not for a long time, and even then with care. For the heroes of one department of an army in the field live and die unsung. Their bravest exploits are buried in secrecy. And that is as it must be. But it is a fine tale to go untold.

After he had bathed and shaved, Henri sat down at a tiny table and wrote. He drew a plan also, from a rough one before him. Then he took a match and burned the original drawing until it was but charred black ashes. When he had finished Jean got up from the bed and put on his overcoat.

"To the King?" he said.

"To the King, old friend."

Jean took the letter and went out.

Down below, Sara Lee sat with Henri's ragged tunic on her lap and stitched carefully. Sometime, she reflected, she would be mending worn garments for another man, now far away. A little flood of tenderness came over her. So helpless these men! There was so much to do for them! And soon, please God, she would be helping other tired and weary men, with food, and perhaps a word — when she had acquired some French — and perhaps a thread and needle.

She dined alone that night, as usual. Henri did not appear, though she had sent what she suspected was his

only tunic back to him neatly mended at five o'clock.

As a matter of fact Henri was sound asleep. He had meant to rest only for an hour a body that was crying aloud with fatigue. But Jean, coming in quietly, had found him sleeping like a child, and had put his own blanket over him and left him. Henri slept until morning, when Jean, coming up from his vigil outside the American girl's door, found him waking and rested, and rang for coffee.

Jean sat down on the edge of his bed and put on his shoes and puttees. He was a taciturn man, but now he had something to say that he did not like to say. And Henri knew it.

"What is it?" he asked, his arms under his head. "Come, let us have it! It is, of course, about the American lady."

"It is," Jean said bluntly. "You cannot mix women and war."

"And you think I am doing that?"

"I am not an idiot," Jean growled. "You do not know what you are doing. I do. She is young and lonely. You are young and — not unattractive to women. Already she turns pale when I so much as ask if she has heard from you."

"You asked her that?"

"You were gone much longer than ——"

"And you thought I might send her word, and not you!" Henri's voice was offended. He lay back while the boy brought in the morning coffee and rolls.

"Let me tell you something," he said when the boy

had gone. "She is betrothed to an American. She wears a betrothal ring. I am to her — the French language!"

But though Henri laughed Jean remained grave and brooding. For Henri had not said what Sara Lee already was to him.

It was later in the morning that Henri broached the subject again. They were in the courtyard of an old house, working over the engine of the car.

"I think I have found a location for the young American lady," he said.

Jean hammered for a considerable time at a refractory rim.

"And where?" he asked at last.

Henri named the little town. Like Henri's family name, it must not be told. Too many things happened there, and perhaps it is even now Henri's headquarters. For that portion of the line has changed very little.

Jean fell to renewed hammering.

"If you will be silent I shall explain a plan," Henri said in a cautious tone. "She will make soup, with help which we shall find. And if coming in for refreshments a soldier shall leave a letter for me it is natural, is it not?"

"She will suspect, of course."

"I think not. And she reads no French. None whatever."

Yet Jean's suspicions were not entirely allayed. The plan had its advantages. It was important that Henri receive certain reports, and already the hotel whispered

that Henri was of the secret service. It brought him added deference, of course, but additional danger.

So Jean accepted the plan, but with reservation. And it was not long afterward that he said to Sara Lee, in French: "There is a spider on your neck, mademoiselle."

But Sara Lee only said, "I'm sorry, Jean; you'll have to speak English to me for a while, I'm afraid."

And though he watched her for five minutes she did not put her hand to her neck.

However, that was later on. That afternoon Henri spent an hour with the Minister of War. And at the end of that time he said: "Thank you, Baron. I think you will not regret it. America must learn the truth, and how better than through those friendly people who come to us to help?"

It is as well to state, however, that he left the Minister of War with the undoubted impression that Miss Sara Lee Kennedy was a spinster of uncertain years.

Sara Lee packed her own suitcase that afternoon, doing it rather nervously because Henri was standing in the room by the window waiting for it. He had come in as matter-of-factly as Harvey had entered the parlor at Aunt Harriet's, except that he carried in his arms some six towels, a cake of soap and what looked suspiciously like two sheets.

"The house I have under consideration," he said, "has little to recommend it but the building, and even that —— The occupants have gone away, and — you are not a soldier."

Sara Lee eyed the bundle.

"I don't need sheets," she expostulated.

"There are but two. And Jean has placed blankets in the car. You must have a pillow also."

He calmly took one of the hotel pillows from the bed.

"What else?" he asked calmly. "Cigarettes? But no, you do not smoke."

Sara Lee eyed him with something very like despair.

"Aren't you ever going to let me think for myself?"

"Would you have thought of these?" he demanded triumphantly. "You — you think only of soup and tired soldiers. Some one must think of you."

And there was a touch of tenderness in his voice. Sara Lee felt it and trembled slightly. He was so fine, and he must not think of her that way. It was not real. It couldn't be. Men were lonely here, where everything was hard and cruel. They wanted some of the softness of life, and all of kindness and sweetness that she could give should be Henri's. But she must make it clear that there could never be anything more.

There was a tightness about her mouth as she folded the white frock.

"I know that garment," he said boyishly. "Do you remember the night you wore it? And how we wandered in the square and made the plan that has brought us together again?"

Sara Lee reached down into her suitcase and brought up Harvey's picture.

"I would like you to see this," she said a little breathlessly. "It is the man I am to marry."

For a moment she thought Henri was not going to take it. But he came, rather slowly, and held out his hand for it. He went with it to the window and stood there for some time looking down at it.

"When are you going to marry him, mademoiselle?"

"As soon as I go back."

Sara Lee had expected some other comment, but he made none. He put the photograph very quietly on the bed before her, and gathered up the linen and the pillow in his arms.

"I shall send for your luggage, mademoiselle. And you will find me at the car outside, waiting."

And so it was that a very silent Henri sat with Jean going out to that strange land which was to be Sara Lee's home for many months. And a very silent Sara Lee, flanked with pillow and blankets, who sat back alone and tried to recall the tones of Harvey's voice.

And failed.

X

FROM Dunkirk to the Front, the road, after the Belgian line was passed, was lightly guarded. Henri came out of a reverie to explain to Sara Lee.

"We have not many men," he said. "And those that remain are holding the line. It is very weary, our army."

Now at home Uncle James had thought very highly of the Belgian Army. He had watched the fight they made, and he had tried to interest Sara Lee in it. But without much result. She had generally said: "Isn't it wonderful!" or "horrible," as the case might be, and put out of her mind as soon as possible the ringing words he had been reading. But she had not forgotten, she found. They came back to her as she rode through that deserted countryside. Henri, glancing back somewhat later, found her in tears.

He climbed back at once into the rear of the car and sat down beside her.

"You are homesick, I think?"

"Yes. But not for myself. I am just homesick for all the people who have lost their homes. You — and Jean, and all the rest."

"Some day I shall tell you about my home and what has happened to it," he said gravely. "Not now. It is not pleasant. But you must remember this: We are going back home, we Belgians." And after a little pause: "Just as you are."

He lapsed into silence after that, and Sara Lee, stealing a glance at him, saw his face set and hard. She had a purely maternal impulse to reach over and pat his hand.

Jean did not like Henri's shift to the rear of the car. He drove with a sort of irritable feverishness, until Henri leaned over and touched him on the shoulder.

"We have mademoiselle with us, Jean," he said in French.

"It is not difficult to believe," growled Jean. But he slackened his pace somewhat.

So far the road had been deserted. Now they had come up to a stream of traffic flowing slowly toward the Front. Armored cars, looking tall and top-heavy, rumbled and jolted along. Many lorries, one limousine containing a general, a few Paris buses, all smeared a dingy gray and filled with French soldiers, numberless and nondescript open machines, here and there a horse-drawn vehicle — these filled the road. In and out among them Jean threaded his way, while Sara Lee grew crimson with the effort to see it all, and Henri sat very stiff and silent.

At a crossroads they were halted by troops who had fallen out for a rest. The men stood at ease, and stared their fill at Sara Lee. Save for a few weary peasants, most of them had seen no women for months. But they were respectful, if openly admiring. And their admiration of her was nothing to Sara Lee's feeling toward them. She loved them all — boys with

their first straggly beards on their chins; older men, looking worn and tired; French and Belgian; smiling and sad. But most of all, for Uncle James' sake, she loved the Belgians.

"I cannot tell you," she said breathlessly to Henri. "It is like a dream come true. And I shall help. You look doubtful sometimes, but I am sure."

"You are heaven sent," Henri replied gravely.

They turned into a crossroad after a time, and there in a little village Sara Lee found her new home. A strange village indeed, unoccupied and largely destroyed. Piles of bricks and plaster lined the streets. Broken glass was everywhere. Jean blew out a tire finally, because of the glass, and they were obliged to walk the remainder of the way.

"A poor place, mademoiselle," Henri said as they went along. "A peaceful little town, and quite beautiful, once. And it harbored no troops. But everything is meat for the mouths of their guns."

Sara Lee stopped and looked about her. Her heart was beating fast, but her lips were steady enough.

"And it is here that I ——"

"A little distance down the street. You must see before you decide."

Steady, passionless firing was going on, not near, but far away, like low thunder before a summer storm. She was for months to live, to eat and sleep and dream to that rumbling from the Ypres salient, to waken when it ceased or to look up from her work at the strange silence. But it was new to her then, and terrible.

"Do they still shell this — this town?" she asked, rather breathlessly.

"Not now. They have done their work. Of course ——" he did not finish.

Sara Lee's heart slowed down somewhat. After all, she had asked to be near the Front. And that meant guns and such destruction as was all about her. Only one thing troubled her.

"It is rather far from the trenches, isn't it?"

He smiled slightly.

"Far! It is not very far. Not so far as I would wish, mademoiselle. But, to do what you desire, it is the best I have to offer."

"How far away are the trenches?"

"A quarter of a mile beyond those poplar trees." He indicated on a slight rise a row of great trees broken somewhat but not yet reduced to the twisted skeletons they were to become later on. In a long line they faced the enemy like sentinels, winter-quiet but dauntless, and behind them lay the wreck of the little village, quiet and empty.

"Will the men know I am here?" Sara Lee asked anxiously.

"But, yes, mademoiselle. At night they come up from the trenches, and fresh troops take their places. They come up this street and go on to wherever they are to rest. And when they find that a house of — of mercy is here — and soup, they will come. More than you wish."

"Belgian soldiers?"

"Only Belgian soldiers. That is as you want it to be, I think."

"If only I spoke French!"

"You will learn. And in the meantime, mademoiselle, I have taken the liberty of finding you a servant — a young peasant woman. And you will also have a soldier always on guard."

Something that had been in the back of Sara Lee's mind for some time suddenly went away. She had been thinking of Aunt Harriet and the Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Church. She had, in fact, been wondering how they would feel when they learned that she was living alone, the only woman among thousands of men. It had, oddly enough, never occurred to her before.

"You have thought of everything," she said gratefully.

But Henri said nothing. He had indeed thought of everything with a vengeance, with the net result that he was not looking at Sara Lee more than he could help.

These Americans were strange. An American girl would cross the seas, and come here alone with him — a man and human. And she would take for granted that he would do what he was doing for love of his kind — which was partly true; and she would be beautiful and sweet and amiable and quite unself-conscious. And then she would go back home, warm of heart with gratitude, and marry the man of the picture.

The village had but one street, and that deserted and

in ruins. Behind its double row of houses, away from the enemy, lay the fields, a muddy canal and more poplar trees. And from far away, toward Ypres, there came constantly that somewhat casual booming of artillery which marked the first winter of the war.

The sound of the guns had first alarmed, then interested Sara Lee. It was detached then, far away. It meant little to her. It was only later, when she saw some of the results of the sounds she heard, that they became significant. But this is not a tale of the wounding of men. There are many such. This is the story of a little house of mercy, and of a girl with a dauntless spirit, and of two men who loved her. Only that.

The maid Henri had found was already in the house, sweeping. Henri presented her to Sara Lee, and he also brought a smiling little Belgian boy, in uniform and with a rifle.

"Your staff, mademoiselle!" he said. "And your residence!"

Sara Lee looked about her. With the trifling exception that there was no roof, it was whole. And the roof was not necessary, for the floors of the upper story served instead. There was a narrow passage with a room on either side, and a tiny kitchen behind.

Henri threw open a door on the right.

"Your bedroom," he said. "Well furnished, as you will see. It should be, since there has been brought here all the furniture not destroyed in the village."

His blacker mood had fallen away before her naïve delight. He went about smiling boyishly, showing her

the kettles in the kitchen; the supply, already so rare, of firewood; the little stove. But he stiffened somewhat when she placed her hand rather timidly on his arm.

"How am I ever to thank you?" she asked.

"By doing much good. And by never going beyond the poplar trees."

She promised both very earnestly.

But she was a little sad as she followed Henri about, he volubly expatiating on such advantages as plenty of air owing to the absence of a roof; and the attraction of the stove, which he showed much like a salesman anxious to make a sale. "Such a stove!" he finished contentedly. "It will make soup even in your absence, mademoiselle! Our peasants eat much soup; therefore it is what you would call a trained stove."

Before Sara Lee's eyes came a picture of Harvey and the Leete house, its white dining room, its bay window for plants, its comfortable charm and prettiness. And Harvey's face, as he planned it for her — anxious, pleading, loving. She drew a long breath.

If Henri noticed her abstraction he ignored it. He was all over the little house. One moment he was instructing Marie volubly, to her evident confusion. On René, the guard, he descended like a young cyclone, with warnings for mademoiselle's safety and comfort. He was everywhere, sitting on the bed to see if it was soft, tramping hard on the upper floor to discover if any plaster might loosen below, and pausing in that

process to look keenly at a windmill in the field behind.

When he came down it was to say: "You are not entirely alone in the village, after all, mademoiselle. The miller has come back. I shall visit him now and explain."

He found Sara Lee, however, still depressed. She was sitting in a low chair in the kitchen gazing thoughtfully at the stove.

"I am here," she said. "And here is the house, and a stove, and — everything. But there are no shops; and what shall I make my soup out of?"

Henri stared at her rather blankly.

"True!" he said. "Very true. And I never thought of it!"

Then suddenly they both laughed, the joyous ringing laugh of ridiculous youth, which can see its own absurdities and laugh at them.

Henri counted off on his fingers.

"I thought of water," he said, "and a house, and firewood, and kettles and furniture. And there I ceased thinking."

It was dusk now. Marie lifted the lid from the stove, and a warm red glow of reflected light filled the little kitchen. It was warm and cozy; the kettle sang like the purring of a cat. And something else that had troubled Sara Lee came out.

"I wonder," she said, "if you are doing all this only because I — well, because I persuaded you."

Which she had not. "Do the men really need me here?"

"Need you, mademoiselle?"

"Do they need what little I can give? They were smiling, all the ones I saw."

"A Belgian soldier always smiles. Even when he is fighting." His voice had lost its gayety and had taken on a deeper note. "Mademoiselle, I have brought you here, where I can think of no other woman who would have the courage to come, because you are needed. I cannot promise you entire safety"—his mouth tightened—"but I can promise you work and gratitude. Such gratitude, mademoiselle, as you may never know again."

That reassured her. But in her practical mind the matter of supplies loomed large. She brought the matter up again directly.

"It is to be hot chocolate and soup?" he asked.

"Both, if I find I have enough money. Soup only, perhaps."

"And soup takes meat, of course."

"It should, to be strengthening."

Henri looked up, to see Jean in the doorway smiling grimly.

"It is very simple," Jean said to him in French. "You have no other duties of course; so each day you shall buy in the market place at Dunkirk, with American money. And I shall become a delivery boy and bring out food for mademoiselle, and whatever is needed."

Henri smiled back at him cheerfully. "An excellent plan, Jean," he said. "Not every day, but frequently."

Jean growled and disappeared.

However, there was the immediate present to think of, and while Jean thawed his hands at the fire and Sara Lee was taking housewifely stock of her new home, Henri disappeared.

He came back in a half hour, carrying in a small basket butter, eggs, bread and potatoes.

"The miller!" he explained cheerfully to Sara Lee. "He has still a few hens, and hidden somewhere a cow. We can have milk — is there a pail for Marie to take to the mill? — and bread and an omelet. That is a meal!"

There was but one lamp, which hung over the kitchen stove. The room across from Sara Lee's bedroom contained a small round dining table and chairs. Sara Lee, enveloped in a large pinafore apron, made the omelet in the kitchen. Marie brought a pail of fresh milk. Henri, with a towel over his left arm, and in absurd mimicry of a Parisian waiter, laid the table; and Jean, dour Jean, caught a bit of the infection, and finding four bottles set to work with his pocketknife to fit candles into their necks.

Standing in corners, smiling, useless against the cheerful English that flowed from the kitchen stove to the dining room and back again, were René and Marie. It was of no use to attempt to help. Did the fire burn low, it was the young officer who went out for fresh wood. But René could not permit that

twice. He brought in great armfuls of firewood and piled them neatly by the stove.

Henri was absurdly happy again. He would come to the door gravely, with Sara Lee's little phrase book in hand, and read from it in a solemn tone:

"'Shall we have duck or chicken?' 'Where can we get a good dinner at a moderate price?' 'Waiter, you have spilled wine on my dress.' 'Will you have a cigar?' 'No, thank you. I prefer a pipe.'"

And Sara Lee beat up the eggs and found, after a bad moment, some salt in a box, and then poured her omelet into the pan. She was very anxious that it be a good omelet. She must make good her claim as a cook or Henri's sublime faith in her would die.

It was a divine omelet. Even Jean said so. They sat, the three of them, in the cold little dining room and never knew that it was cold, and they ate prodigious quantities of omelet and bread and butter, and bully beef out of a tin, and drank a great deal of milk.

Even Jean thawed at last, under the influence of food and Sara Lee. Before the meal was over he was planning how to get her supplies to her and making notes on a piece of paper as to what she would need at once. They adjourned to Sara Lee's bedroom, where Marie had kindled a fire in the little iron stove, and sat there in the warmth with two candles, still planning. By that time Sara Lee had quite forgotten that at home one did not have visitors in one's bedroom.

Suddenly Henri held up his hand.

"Listen!" he said.

That was the first time Sara Lee had ever heard the quiet shuffling step of tired men, leaving their trenches under cover of darkness. Henri threw his military cape over her shoulders and she stood in the dark doorway, watching.

The empty street was no longer empty. From gutter to gutter flowed a stream of men, like a sluggish river which narrowed where a fallen house partly filled the way; not talking, not singing, just moving, bent under their heavy and mud-covered equipment. Here and there the clack of wooden sabots on the cobbles told of one poor fellow not outfitted with leather shoes. The light of a match here and there showed some few lucky enough to have still remaining cigarettes, and revealed also, in the immediate vicinity, a white bandage or two. Some few, recognizing Henri's officer's cap, saluted. Most of them stumbled on, too weary to so much as glance aside.

Nothing that Sara Lee had dreamed of war was like this. This was dreary and sodden and hopeless. Those fresh troops at the crossroads that day had been blithe and smiling. There had been none of the glitter and panoply of war, but there had been movement, the beating of a drum, the sharp cries of officers as the lines re-formed.

Here there were no lines. Just such a stream of men as at home might issue at night from a coal mine, too weary for speech. Only here they were packed together closely, and they did not speak, and some of them were wounded.

"There are so many!" she whispered to Henri. "A hundred such efforts as mine would not be enough."

"I would to God there were more!" Henri replied, through shut teeth.

"Listen, mademoiselle," he said later. "You cannot do all the kind work of the world. But you can do your part. And you will start by caring for only such as are wounded or ill. The others can go on. But every night some twenty or thirty, or even more, will come to your door — men slightly wounded or too weary to go on without a rest. And for those there will be a chair by the fire, and something hot, or perhaps a clean bandage. It sounds small? But in a month, think! You will have given comfort to perhaps a thousand men. You — alone!"

"I — alone!" she said in a queer choking voice. "And what about you? It is you who have made it possible."

But Henri was looking down the street to where the row of poplars hid what lay beyond. Far beyond a star shell had risen above the flat fields and floated there, a pure and lovely thing, shedding its white light over the terrain below. It gleamed for some thirty seconds and went out.

"Like that!" Henri said to her, but in French. "Like that you are to me. Bright and shining — and so soon gone."

Sara Lee thought he had asked her if she was cold.

XI

THE girl was singularly adaptable. In a few days it was as though she had been for years in her little ruined house. She was very happy, though there was scarcely a day when her heart was not wrung. Such young-old faces! Such weary men! And such tales of wretchedness!

She got the tales by intuition rather than by words, though she was picking up some French at that. Marie would weep openly, at times. The most frequent story was of no news from the country held by the Germans, of families left with nothing and probably starving. The first inquiry was always for news. Had the American lady any way to make inquiry?

In time Sara Lee began to take notes of names and addresses, and through Mr. Travers, in London, and the Relief Commission, in Belgium, bits of information came back. A certain family was in England at a village in Surrey. Of another a child had died. Here was one that could not be located, and another reported massacred during the invasion.

Later on Sara Lee was to find her little house growing famous, besieged by anxious soldiers who besought her efforts, so that she used enormous numbers of stamps and a great deal of effort. But that was later on. And when that time came she turned to the work as a refuge from her thoughts. For days were coming when Sara Lee did not want to think.

But like all big things the little house made a humble beginning. A mere handful of men, daring the gibes of their comrades, stopped in that first night the door stood open, with its invitation of firelight and candles. But these few went away with a strange story — of a beautiful American, and hot soup, and even a cigarette apiece. That had been Henri's contribution, the cigarettes. And soon the fame of the little house went up and down the trenches, and it was like to die of overpopularity.

It was at night that the little house of mercy bloomed like a flower. During the daytime it was quiet, and it was then, as time went on, that Sara Lee wrote her letters home and to England, and sent her lists of names to be investigated. But from the beginning there was much to do. Vegetables were to be prepared for the soup, Marie must find and bring in milk for the chocolate, René must lay aside his rifle and chop firewood.

One worry, however, disappeared with the days. Henri was proving a clever buyer. The money she sent in secured marvels. Only Jean knew, or ever knew, just how much of Henri's steadily decreasing funds went to that buying. Certainly not Sara Lee. And Jean expostulated only once — to be met by such blazing fury as set him sullen for two days.

"I am doing this," Henri finished, a trifle ashamed of himself, "not for mademoiselle, but for our army. And since when have you felt that the best we can give is too much for such a purpose?"

Which was, however lofty, only a part of the truth.

So supplies came in plentifully, and Sara Lee pared vegetables and sang a bit under her breath, and glowed with good will when at night the weary vanguard of a weary little army stopped at her door and scraped the mud off its boots and edged in shyly.

She was very happy, and her soup was growing famous. It is true that the beef she used was not often beef, but she did not know that, and merely complained that the meat was stringy. Now and then there was no beef at all, and she used hares instead. On quiet days, when there was little firing beyond the poplar trees, she went about with a basket through the neglected winter gardens of the town. There were Brussels sprouts, and sometimes she found in a cellar carrots or cabbages. She had potatoes always.

It was at night then, from seven in the evening until one, that the little house was busiest. Word had gone out through the trenches beyond the poplar trees that slightly wounded men needing rest before walking back to their billets, exhausted and sick men, were welcome to the little house. It was soon necessary to give the officers tickets for the men. René took them in at the door, with his rifle in the hollow of his arm, and he was as implacable as a ticket taker at the opera.

Never once in all the months of her life there did Sara Lee have an ugly word, an offensive glance. But, though she never knew this, many half articulate and wholly earnest prayers were offered for her in those

little churches behind the lines where sometimes the men slept, and often they prayed.

She was very businesslike. She sent home to the Ladies' Aid Society a weekly record of what had been done: So many bowls of soup; so many cups of chocolate; so many minor injuries dressed. Because, very soon, she found first aid added to her activities. She sickened somewhat at first. Later she allowed to Marie much of the serving of food, and in the little *salle à manger* she had ready on the table basins, water, cotton, iodine and bandages.

Henri explained the method to her.

"It is a matter of cleanliness," he said. "First one washes the wound and then there is the iodine. Then cotton, a bandage, and — a surgeon could do little more."

Henri and Jean came often. And more than once during the first ten days Jean spent the night rolled in a blanket by the kitchen fire, and Henri disappeared. He was always back in the morning, however, looking dirty and very tired. Sara Lee sewed more than one rent for him, those days, but she was strangely incurious. It was as though, where everything was strange, Henri's erratic comings and goings were but a part with the rest.

Then one night the unexpected happened. The village was shelled.

Sara Lee had received her first letter from Harvey that day. The maid at Morley's had forwarded it to her, and Henri had brought it up.

"I think I have brought you something you wish for very much," he said, looking down at her.

"Mutton?" she inquired anxiously.

"Better than that."

"Sugar?"

"A letter, mademoiselle."

Afterward he could not quite understand the way she had suddenly drawn in her breath. He had no memory, as she had, of Harvey's obstinate anger at her going, his conviction that she was doing a thing criminally wrong and cruel.

"Give it to me, please."

She took it into her room and closed the door. When she came out again she was composed and quiet, but rather white. Poor Henri! He was half mad that day with jealousy. Her whiteness he construed as longing.

This is a part of Harvey's letter:

You may think that I have become reconciled, but I have not. If I could see any reason for it I might. But what reason is there? So many others, older and more experienced, could do what you are doing, and more safely.

In your letter from the steamer you tell me not to worry. Good God, Sara Lee, how can I help worrying? I do not even know where you are! If you are in England, well and good. If you are abroad I do not want to know it. I know these foreigners. I run into them every day. And they do not understand

American women. I get crazy when I think about it.

I have had to let the Leete house go. There is not likely to be such a chance soon again. Business is good, but I don't seem to care much about it any more. Honestly, dear, I think you have treated me very badly. I always feel as though the people I meet are wondering if we have quarreled or what on earth took you away on this wild-goose chase. I don't know myself, so how can I tell them?

I shall always love you, Sara Lee. I guess I'm that sort. But sometimes I wonder if, when we are married, you will leave me again in some such uncalled-for way. I warn you now, dear, that I won't stand for it. I'm suffering too much. HARVEY.

Sara Lee wore the letter next her heart, but it did not warm her. She went through the next few hours in a sort of frozen composure and ate nothing at all.

Then came the bombardment.

Henri and Jean, driving out from Dunkirk, had passed on the road ammunition trains, waiting in the road until dark before moving on to the Front. Henri had given Sara Lee her letter, had watched jealously for its effect on her, and then, his own face white and set, had gone on down the ruined street.

Here within the walls of a destroyed house he disappeared. The place was evidently familiar to him, for he moved without hesitation. Broken furniture still stood in the roofless rooms, and in front of a battered bureau Henri paused. Still whistling under his

breath, he took off his uniform and donned a strange one, of greenish gray. In the pocket of the blouse he stuffed a soft round cap of the same color. Then, resuming his cape and Belgian cap, with its tassel over his forehead, he went out into the street again. He carried in his belt a pistol, but it was not the one he had brought in with him. As a matter of fact, by the addition of the cap in his pocket, Henri was at that moment in the full uniform of a *lieutenant* of a Bavarian infantry regiment, pistol and all.

He went down the street and along the road toward the poplars. He met the first detachment of men out of the trenches just beyond the trees, and stepped aside into the mud to let them pass, calling a greeting to them out of the darkness.

"*Bonsoir!*" they replied, and saluted stiffly. There were few among them who did not know his voice, and fewer still who did not suspect his business.

"A brave man," they said among themselves as they went on.

"How long will he last?" asked one young soldier, a boy in his teens.

"One cannot live long who does as he does," replied a gaunt and bearded man. "But it is a fine life while it continues. A fine life!"

The boy stepped out of the shuffling line and looked behind him. He could see only the glow of Henri's eternal cigarette. "I should like to go with him," he muttered wistfully.

The ammunition train was in the village now. It

kept the center of the road, lest it should slide into the mud on either side and be mired. The men moved out of its way into the ditch, grumbling.

Henri went whistling softly down the road.

The first shell fell in the neglected square. The second struck the rear wagons of the ammunition train. Henri heard the terriffic explosion that followed, and turning ran madly back into the village. More shells fell into the road. The men scattered like partridges, running for the fields, but the drivers of the ammunition wagons beat their horses and came lurching and shouting down the road.

There was cold terror in Henri's heart. He ran madly, throwing aside his cape as he went. More shells fell ahead in the street. Once in the darkness he fell flat over the body of a horse. There was a steady groaning from the ditch near by. But he got up and ran on, a strange figure with his flying hair and his German uniform.

He was all but stabbed by René when he entered the little house.

"Mademoiselle?" Henri gasped, holding René's bayonet away from his heaving chest.

"I am here," said Sara Lee's voice from the little *salle à manger*. "Let them carry in the wounded. I am getting ready hot water and bandages. There is not much space, for the corner of room has been shot away."

She was dead white in the candlelight, but very calm.

"You cannot stay here," Henri panted. "At any time ——"

Another shell fell, followed by the rumble of falling walls.

"Some one must stay," said Sara Lee. "There must be wounded in the streets. Marie is in the cellar."

Henri pleaded passionately with her to go to the cellar, but she refused. He would have gathered her up in his arms and carried her there, but Jean came in, leading a wounded man, and Henri gave up in despair.

All that night they worked, a ghastly business. More than one man died that night in the little house, while a blond young man in a German uniform gave him his last mouthful of water or took down those pitifully vague addresses which were all the dying Belgians had to give.

"I have not heard — last at Aerschot, but now — God knows where."

No more shells fell. At dawn, with all done that could be done, Sara Lee fainted quietly in the hallway, and Henri carried her in and placed her on her bed. A corner of the room was indeed gone. The mantel was shattered, and the little stove. But on the floor lay Harvey's photograph, uninjured. Henri lifted it and looked at it. Then he placed it on the table, and very reverently he kissed the palm of Sara Lee's quiet hand.

Daylight found the street pitiful indeed. Henri, at whose costume René had been casting wondering glances all night, sent a request for men from the

trenches to clear away the bodies of the horses and bury them, and somewhat later over a single grave in the fields there was a simple ceremony of burial for the men who had fallen. Henri had changed again by that time, but he sternly forbade Sara Lee to attend.

"On pain," he said, "of no more supplies, mademoiselle. These things must be. They are war. But you can do nothing to help, and it will be very sad."

Ambulances took away the wounded at dawn, and the little house became quiet once more. With planks René repaired the damage to the corner, and triumphantly produced and set up another stove. He even put up a mantelshelf, and on it, smiling somewhat, he placed Harvey's picture.

Sara Lee saw it there, and a tiny seed of resentment took root and grew.

"If there had been no one here last night," she said to the photograph, "many more would have died. How can you say I am cruel to you? Isn't this worth the doing?"

But Harvey remained impassive, detached, his eyes on the photographer's white muslin screen. And the angle of his jaw was set and dogged.

XII

THAT morning there was a conference in the little house — Colonel Lilias, who had come in before for a mute but appreciative call on Sara Lee, and for a cup of chocolate; Captain Tournay, Jean and Henri. It was held round the little table in the *salle à manger,* after Marie had brought coffee and gone out.

"They had information undoubtedly," said the colonel. "The same thing happened at Pervyse when an ammunition train went through. They had the place, and what is more they had the time. Of course there are the airmen."

"It did not leave the main road until too late for observation from the air," Henri put in shortly.

"Yet any one who saw it waiting at the crossroads might have learned its destination. The drivers talk sometimes."

"But the word had to be carried across," said Captain Tournay. "That is the point. My men report flashes of lights from the fields. We have followed them up and found no houses, no anything. In this flat country a small light travels far."

"I shall try to learn to-night," Henri said. "It is, of course, possible that some one from over there ——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"I think not." Colonel Lilias put a hand on Henri's shoulder affectionately. "They have not your finesse, boy. And I doubt if, in all their army, they have so brave a man."

Henri flushed.

"There is a courage under fire, with their fellows round — that is one thing. And a courage of attack — that is even more simple. But the bravest man is the one who works alone — the man to whom capture is death without honor."

The meeting broke up. Jean and Henri went away in the car, and though supplies came up regularly Sara Lee did not see the battered gray car for four days. At the end of that time Henri came alone. Jean, he said briefly, was laid up for a little while with a flesh wound in his shoulder. He would be well very soon. In the meantime here at last was mutton. It had come from England, and he, Henri, had found it lying forgotten and lonely and very sad and had brought it along.

After that Henri disappeared on foot. It was mid-afternoon and a sunny day. Sara Lee saw him walking briskly across the fields and watched him out of sight. She spoke some French now, and she had gathered from René, who had no scruples about listening at a door, that Henri was the bravest man in the Belgian Army.

Until now Sara Lee had given small thought to Henri's occupation. She knew nothing of war, and the fact that Henri, while wearing a uniform, was unattached, had not greatly impressed her. Had she known the constitution of a modern army she might have wondered over his freedom, his powerful car, his passes and maps. But his detachment had not seemed

odd to her. Even his appearance during the bombardment in the uniform of a German *lieutenant* had meant nothing to her. She had never seen a German uniform.

That evening, however, when he returned she ventured a question. They dined together, the two of them, for the first time at the little house alone. Always before Jean had made the third. And it was a real meal, for Sara Lee had sacrificed a bit of mutton from her soup, and Henri had produced from his pocket a few small and withered oranges.

"A gift!" he said gayly, and piled them in a precarious heap in the center of the table. On the exact top he placed a walnut.

"Now speak gently and walk softly," he said. "It is a work of art and not to be lightly demolished."

He was alternately gay and silent during the meal, and more than once Sara Lee found his eyes on her, with something new and different in them.

"Just you and I together!" he said once. "It is very wonderful."

And again: "When you go back to him, shall you tell him of your good friend who has tried hard to serve you?"

"Of course I shall," said Sara Lee. "And he will write you, I know. He will be very grateful."

But it was she who was silent after that, because somehow it would be hard to make Harvey understand. And as for his being grateful ——

"Mademoiselle," said Henri later on, "would you

object if I make a suggestion? You wear a very valuable ring. I think it is entirely safe, but — who can tell? And also it is not entirely kind to remind men who are far from all they love that you ——"

Sara Lee flushed and took off her ring.

"I am glad you told me," she said. And Henri did not explain that the Belgian soldiers would not recognize the ring as either a diamond or a symbol, but that to him it was close to torture.

It was when he insisted on carrying out the dishes, singing a little French song as he did so, that Sara Lee decided to speak what was in her mind. He was in high spirits then.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "shall I show you something that the eye of no man has seen before, and that, when we have seen it, shall never be seen again?"

On her interested consent he called in Marie and René, making a great ceremony of the matter, and sending Marie into hysterical giggling.

"Now see!" he said earnestly. "No eye before has ever seen or will again. Will you guess, mademoiselle? Or you, Marie? René?"

"A tear?" ventured Sara Lee.

"But — do I look like weeping?"

He did not, indeed. He stood, tall and young and smiling before them, and produced from his pocket the walnut.

"Perceive!" he said, breaking it open and showing the kernel. "Has human eye ever before seen it?"

He thrust it into Marie's open mouth. "And it is gone! *Voilà tout!*"

It was that evening, while Sara Lee cut bandages and Henri rolled them, that she asked him what his work was. He looked rather surprised, and rolled for a moment without replying. Then: "I am a man of all work," he said. "What you call odd jobs."

"Then you don't do any fighting?"

"In the trenches — no. But now and then I have a little skirmish."

A sort of fear had been formulating itself in Sarah Lee's mind. The trenches she could understand or was beginning to understand. But this alternately joyous and silent idler, this soldier of no regiment and no detail — was he playing a man's part in the war?

"Why don't you go into the trenches?" she asked with her usual directness. "You say there are too few men. Yet — I can understand Monsieur Jean, because he has only one eye. But you!"

"I do something," he said, avoiding her eyes. "It is not a great deal. It is the thing I can do best. That is all."

He went away some time after that, leaving the little house full and busy justifying its existence. The miller's son, who came daily to chat with Marie, was helping in the kitchen. By the warm stove, and only kept from standing over it by Marie's sharp orders, were as many men as could get near. Each held a bowl of hot soup, and — that being a good day — a piece of bread. Tall soldiers and little ones, all dirty,

all weary, almost all smiling, they peered over each other's shoulders, to catch, if might be, a glimpse of Marie's face.

When they came too close she poked an elbow into some hulking fellow and sent him back.

"Elbow-room, in the name of God," she would beg.

Over all the room hung the warm steam from the kettles, and a delicious odor, and peace.

Sara Lee had never heard of the word *morale*. She would have been astonished to have been told that she was helping the *morale* of an army. But she gave each night in that little house of mercy something that nothing else could give — warmth and welcome, but above all a touch of home.

That night Henri did not come back. She stood by her table bandaging, washing small wounds, talking her bits of French, until one o'clock. Then, the last dressing done, she went to the kitchen. Marie was there, with Maurice, the miller's son.

"Has the captain returned?" she asked.

"Not yet, mademoiselle."

"Leave a warm fire," Sara Lee said. "He will probably come in later."

Maurice went away, with a civil good night. Sara Lee stood in the doorway after he had gone, looking out. Farther along the line there was a bombardment going on. She knew now what a bombardment meant and her brows contracted. Somewhere there in the trenches men were enduring that, while Henri ——

She said a little additional prayer that night, which

was that she should have courage to say to him what she felt — that there were big things to do, and that it should not all be left to these smiling, ill-clad peasant soldiers.

At that moment Henri, in his gray-green uniform, was cutting wire before a German trench, one of a party of German soldiers, who could not know in the darkness that there had been a strange addition to their group. Cutting wire and learning many things which it was well that he should know.

Now and then, in perfect German, he whispered a question. Always he received a reply. And stowed it away in his tenacious memory for those it most concerned.

At daylight he was asleep by Sara Lee's kitchen fire. And at daylight Sara Lee was awakened by much firing, and putting on a dressing gown she went out to see what was happening. René was in the street looking toward the poplar trees.

"An attack," he said briefly.

"You mean — the Germans?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

She went back into the little ruined house, heavy-hearted. She knew now what it meant, an attack. That night there would be ambulances in the street, and word would come up that certain men were gone — would never seek warmth and shelter in her kitchen or beg like children for a second bowl of soup.

On the kitchen floor by the dying fire Henri lay asleep.

XIII

MUCH has been said of the work of spies — said and written. Here is a woman in Paris sending forbidden messages on a marked coin. Men are tapped on the shoulder by a civil gentleman in a sack suit, and walk away with him, never to be seen again.

But of one sort of spy nothing has been written and but little is known. Yet by him are battles won or lost. On the intelligence he brings attacks are prepared for and counter-attacks launched. It is not always the airman, in these days of camouflage, who brings word of ammunition trains or of new batteries.

In the early days of the war the work of the secret service at the Front was of the gravest importance. There were fewer air machines, and observation from the air was a new science. Also trench systems were incomplete. Between them, known to a few, were breaks of solid land, guarded from behind. To one who knew, it was possible, though dangerous beyond words, to cross the inundated country that lay between the Belgian Front and the German lines, and even with good luck to go farther.

Henri, for instance, on that night before had left the advanced trench at the railway line, had crawled through the Belgian barbed wire, and had advanced, standing motionless as each star shell burst overhead, and then moving on quickly. The inundation was his greatest difficulty. Shallow in most places, it was full

of hidden wire and crisscrossed with irrigation ditches. Once he stumbled into one, but he got out by swimming. Had he been laden with a rifle and equipment it might have been difficult.

He swore to himself as his feet touched ground again. For a star shell was hanging overhead, and his efforts had sent wide and ever increasingly widening circles over the placid surface of the lagoon. Let them lap to the German outposts and he was lost.

Henri's method was peculiar to himself. Where there was dry terrain he did as did the others, crouched and crept. But here in the salt marshes, where the sea had been called to Belgium's aid, he had evolved a system of moving, neck deep in water, stopping under the white night lights, advancing in the darkness. There was no shelter. The country was flat as a hearth.

He would crawl out at last in the darkness and lie flat, as the dead lie. And then, inch by inch, he would work his way forward, by routes that he knew. Sometimes he went entirely through the German lines, and reconnoitered on the roads behind. They were shallow lines then, for the inundation made the country almost untenable, and a charge in force from the Belgians across was unlikely.

Henri knew his country well, as well as he loved it. In a farmhouse behind the German lines he sometimes doffed his wet gray-green uniform and put on the clothing of a Belgian peasant. Trust Henri then for being a lout, a simple fellow who spoke only Flemish

— but could hear in many tongues. Watch him standing at crossroads and marveling at big guns that rumble by.

At first Henri had wished, having learned of an attack, to be among those who repelled it. Then one day his King had sent for him to come to that little village which was now his capital city.

He had been sent in alone and had found the King at the table, writing. Henri bowed and waited. They were not unlike, these two men, only Henri was younger and lighter, and where the King's eyes were gray Henri's were blue. Such a queer setting for a king it was — a tawdry summer home, ill-heated and cheaply furnished. But by the presence of Belgium's man of all time it became royal.

So Henri bowed and waited, and soon the King got up and shook hands with him. As a matter of fact they knew each other rather well, but to explain more would be to tell that family name of Henri's which must never be known.

"Sit down," said the King gravely. And he got a box of cigars from the mantelpiece and offered it. "I sent for you because I want to talk to you. You are doing valuable work."

"I am glad you think it so, sire," said Henri rather unhappily, because he felt what was coming. "But I cannot do it all the time. There are intervals ——"

An ordinary mortal may not interrupt a king, but a king may interrupt anything, except perhaps a German bombardment.

"Intervals, of course. If there were not you would be done in a month."

"But I am a soldier. My place is ——"

"Your place is where you are most useful."

Henri was getting nothing out of the cigar. He flung it away and got up.

"I want to fight too," he said stubbornly. "We need every man, and I am — rather a good shot. I do this other because I can do it. I speak their infernal tongue. But it's dirty business at the best, sire." He remembered to put in the sire, but rather ungraciously. Indeed he shot it out like a bullet.

"Dirty business!" said the King thoughtfully. "I see what you mean. It is, of course. But — not so dirty as the things they have done, and are doing."

He sat still and let Henri stamp up and down, because, as has been said, he knew the boy. And he had never been one to insist on deference, which was why he got so much of it. But at last he got up and when Henri stood still, rather ashamed of himself, he put an arm over the boy's shoulders.

"I want you to do this thing, for me. And this thing only," he said. "It is the work you do best. There are others who can fight, but — I do not know any one else who can do as you have done."

Henri promised. He would have promised to go out and drown himself in the sea, just beyond the wind-swept little garden, for the tall grave man who stood before him. Then he bowed and went out, and the King went back to his plain pine table and his work.

That was the reason why Sara Lee found him asleep on the floor by her kitchen stove that morning, and went back to her cold bed to lie awake and think. But no explanation came to her.

The arrival of Marie roused Henri. The worst of the bombardment was over, but there was far-away desultory firing. He listened carefully before, standing outside in the cold, he poured over his head and shoulders a pail of cold water. He was drying himself vigorously when he heard Sara Lee's voice in the kitchen.

The day began for Henri when first he saw the girl. It might be evening, but it was the beginning for him. So he went in when he had finished his toilet and bowed over her hand.

"You are cold, mademoiselle."

"I think I am nervous. There was an attack this morning."

"Yes?"

Marie had gone into the next room, and Sara Lee raised haggard eyes to his.

"Henri," she said desperately — it was the first time she had called him that —"I have something to say to you, and it's not very pleasant."

"You are going home?" It was the worst thing he could think of. But she shook her head.

"You will think me most ungrateful and unkind."

"You? Kindness itself!"

"But this is different. It is not for myself. It is because I care a great deal about — about ——"

"Mademoiselle!"

"About your honor. And somehow this morning, when I found you here asleep, and those poor fellows in the trenches fighting——"

Henri stared at her. So that was it! And he could never tell her. He was sworn to secrecy by every tradition and instinct of his work. He could never tell her, and she would go on thinking him a shirker and a coward. She would be grateful. She would be sweetness itself. But deep in her heart she would loathe him, as only women can hate for a failing they never forgive.

"But I have told you," he said rather wildly, "I am not idle. I do certain things — not much, but of a degree of importance."

"You do not fight."

In Sara Lee's defense many things may be urged — her ignorance of modern warfare; the isolation of her lack of knowledge of the language; but, perhaps more than anything, a certain rigidity of standard that comprehended no halfway ground. Right was right and wrong was wrong to her in those days. Men were brave or were cowards. Henri was worthy or unworthy. And she felt that, for all his kindness to her, he was unworthy.

He could have set himself right with a word, at that. But his pride was hurt. He said nothing except, when she asked if he had minded what she said, to reply: "I am sorry you feel as you do. I am not angry."

He went away, however, without breakfast. Sara

Lee heard his car going at its usual breakneck speed up the street, and went to the door. She would have called him back if she could, for his eyes haunted her. But he did not look back.

XIV

FOR four days the gray car did not come again. Supplies appeared in another gray car, driven by a surly Fleming. The waking hours were full, as usual. Sara Lee grew a little thin, and seemed to be always listening. But there was no Henri, and something that was vivid and joyous seemed to have gone out of the little house.

Even Marie no longer sang as she swept or washed the kettles, and Sara Lee, making up the records to send home, put little spirit into the letter that went with them.

On the second day she wrote to Harvey.

"I am sorry that you feel as you do," she wrote, perhaps unconsciously using Henri's last words to her. "I have not meant to be cruel. And if you were here you would realize that whether others could have done what I am doing or not — and of course many could — it is worth doing. I hear that other women are establishing houses like this, but the British and the French will not allow women so near the lines. The men come in at night from the trenches so tired, so hungry and so cold. Some of them are wounded too. I dress the little wounds. I do give them something, Harvey dear — if it is only a reminder that there are homes in the world, and everything is not mud and waiting and killing."

She told him that his picture was on her mantel, but she did not say that a corner of her room had been blown away or that the mantel was but a plank from a destroyed house. And she sent a great deal of love, but she did not say that she no longer wore his ring on her finger. And of course she was coming back to him if he still wanted her.

More than Henri's absence was troubling Sara Lee those days. Indeed she herself laid all her anxiety to one thing, a serious one at that. With all the marvels of Henri's buying, and Jean's, her money was not holding out. The scope of the little house had grown with its fame. Now and then there were unexpected calls, too — Marie's mother, starving in Havre; sickness and death in the little town at the crossroads: a dozen small emergencies, but adding to the demands on her slender income. She had, as a matter of fact, already begun to draw on her private capital.

And during the days when no gray car appeared she faced the situation, took stock, as it were, and grew heavy-eyed and wistful.

On the fifth day the gray car came again, but Jean drove it alone. He disclaimed any need for sympathy over his wound, and with René's aid carried in the supplies.

There was the business of checking them off, and the further business of Sara Lee's paying for them in gold. She sat at the table, Jean across, and struggled with centimes and francs and louis d'or, an engrossed frown between her eyebrows.

Jean, sitting across, thought her rather changed. She smiled very seldom, and her eyes were perhaps more steady. It was a young girl he and Henri had brought out to the little house. It was a very serious and rather anxious young woman who sat across from him and piled up the money he had brought back into little stacks.

"Jean," she said finally, "I am not going to be able to do it."

"To do what?"

"To continue — here."

"No?"

"You see I had a little money of my own, and twenty pounds I got in London. You and — and Henri have done miracles for me. But soon I shall have used all my own money, except enough to take me back. And now I shall have to start on my English notes. After that ——"

"You are too good to the men. These cigarettes, now — you could do without them."

"But they are very cheap, and they mean so much, Jean."

She sat still, her hands before her on the table. From the kitchen came the bubbling of the eternal soup. Suddenly a tear rolled slowly down her cheek. She had a hatred of crying in public, but Jean apparently did not notice.

"The trouble, mademoiselle, is that you are trying to feed and comfort too many."

"Jean," she said suddenly, "where is Henri?"

"In England, I think."

The only clear thought in Sara Lee's mind was that Henri was not in France, and that he had gone without telling her. She had hurt him horribly. She knew that. He might never come back to the little house of mercy. There was, in Henri, for all his joyousness, an implacable strain. And she had attacked his honor. What possible right had she to do that?

The memory of all his thoughtful kindness came back, and it was a pale and distracted Sara Lee who looked across the table at Jean.

"Did he tell you anything?"

"Nothing, mademoiselle."

"He is very angry with me, Jean."

"But surely no, mademoiselle. With you? It is impossible."

But though they said nothing more, Jean considered the matter deeply. He understood now, for instance, a certain strangeness in Henri's manner before his departure. They had quarreled, these two. Perhaps it was as well, though Jean was by now a convert to Sara Lee. But he looked out, those days, on but half a world, did Jean. So he saw only the woman hunger in Henri, and nothing deeper. And in Sara Lee a woman, and nothing more.

And — being Jean — he shrugged his shoulders.

They fell to discussing ways and means. The chocolate could be cut out, but not the cigarettes. Sara Lee, arguing vehemently for them and trying to forget other things, remembered suddenly how Uncle

James had hated cigarettes, and that Harvey himself disapproved of them. Somehow Harvey seemed, those days, to present a constant figure of disapproval. He gave her no moral support.

At Jean's suggestion she added to her report of so many men fed with soup, so much tobacco, sort not specified, so many small wounds dressed — a request that if possible her allowance be increased. She did it nervously, but when the letter had gone she felt a great relief. She inclosed a snapshot of the little house.

Jean, as it happens, had lied about Henri. Not once, but several times. He had told Marie, for instance, that Henri was in England, and later on he told René. Then, having done his errand, he drove six miles back along the main road to Dunkirk and picked up Henri, who was sitting on the bank of a canal watching an ammunition train go by.

Jean backed into a lane and turned the car round. After that Henri got in and they went rapidly back toward the Front. It was a different Henri, however, who left the car a mile from the crossroads — a Henri in the uniform of a French private soldier, one of those odd and impracticable uniforms of France during the first year, baggy dark blue trousers, stiff cap, and the long-tailed coat, its skirts turned back and faced. Round his neck he wore a knitted scarf, which covered his chin, and, true to the instinct of the French peasant in a winter campaign, he wore innumerable undergarments, the red of a jersey showing through rents in his coat.

Gone were Henri's long clean lines, his small waist and broad shoulders, the swing of his walk. Instead, he walked with the bent-kneed swing of the French infantryman, that tireless but awkward marching step which renders the French Army so mobile.

He carried all the impedimenta of a man going into the trenches, an extra jar of water, a flat loaf of bread strapped to his haversack, and an intrenching tool jingling at his belt.

Even Jean smiled as he watched him moving along toward the crowded crossroads — smiled and then sighed. For Jean had lost everything in the war. His wife had died of a German bullet long months before, and with her had gone a child much prayed for and soon to come. But Henri had brought back to Jean something to live for — or to die for, as might happen.

Henri walked along gayly. He hailed other French soldiers. He joined a handful and stood talking to them. But he reached the crossroads before the ammunition train.

The crossroads was crowded, as usual — many soldiers, at rest, waiting for the word to fall in, a battery held up by the breaking of a wheel. A temporary forge had been set up, and soldiers in leather aprons were working over the fire. A handful of peasants watched, their dull eyes following every gesture. And one of them was a man Henri sought.

Henri sat down on the ground and lighted a cigarette. The ammunition train rolled in and halted, and

the man Henri watched turned his attention to the train. He had been dull and quiet at the forge, but now he became smiling, a good fellow. He found a man he knew among the drivers and offered him a cigarette. He also produced and presented an entire box of matches. Matches were very dear, and hardly to be bought at any price.

Henri watched grimly and hummed a little song:

" Trou la la, çà ne va guère;
Trou la la, çà ne va pas."

Still humming under his breath, when the peasant left the crossroads he followed him. Not closely. The peasant cut across the fields. Henri followed the road and entered the fields at a different angle. He knew his way quite well, for he had done the same thing each day for four days. Only twice he had been a Belgian peasant, and once he was an officer, and once he had been a priest.

Four days he had done this thing, but to-day was different. To-day there would be something worth while, he fancied. And he made a mental note that Sara Lee must not be in the little house that night.

When he had got to a canal where the pollard willows were already sending out their tiny red buds, Henri sat down again. The village lay before him, desolate and ruined, a travesty of homes. And on a slight rise, but so concealed from him by the willows that only the great wings showed, stood the windmill.

It was the noon respite then, and beyond the line of poplars all was quiet. The enemy liked time for food, and the Belgians, crippled by the loss of that earlier train, were husbanding their ammunition. Far away a gap in the poplar trees showed a German observation balloon, a tiny dot against the sky.

The man Henri watched went slowly, for he carried a bag of grain on his back. Henri no longed watched him. He watched the wind wheel. It had been broken, and one plane was now patched with what looked like a red cloth. There was a good wind, but clearly the miller was idle that day. The great wings were not turning.

Henri sat still and smoked. He thought of many things — of Sara Lee's eyes when in the center of the London traffic she had held the dying donkey; of her small and radiant figure at the Savoy; of the morning he had found her at Calais, in the Gare Maritime, quietly unconscious that she had done a courageous thing. And he thought, too, of the ring and the photograph she carried. But mostly he remembered the things she had said to him on their last meeting.

Perhaps there came to him his temptation too. It would be so easy that night, if things went well, to make a brave showing before her, to let her see that these odd jobs he did had their value and their risks. But he put that from him. The little house of mercy must be empty that night, for her sake. He shivered as he remembered the room where she slept, the corner that was shot away and left open to the street.

So he sat and watched. And at one o'clock the mill wheel began turning. It was easy to count the revolutions by the red wing. Nine times it turned, and stopped. After five minutes or so it turned again, thirty times. Henri smiled: an ugly smile.

"A good guess," he said to himself. "But it must be more than a guess."

His work for the afternoon was done. Still with the bent-kneed swing he struck back to the road, and avoiding the crossroads, went across more fields to a lane where Jean waited with the car. Henri took a plunge into the canal when he had removed his French uniform, and producing a towel from under a bush rubbed himself dry. His lean boyish body gleamed, arms and legs brown from much swimming under peaceful summer suns. On his chest he showed two scars, still pink. Shrapnel bites, he called them. But he had, it is to be feared, a certain young satisfaction in them.

He was in high good humor. The water was icy, and Jean had refused to join him.

"My passion for cleanliness," Henri said blithely, "is the result of my English school days. You would have been the better for an English education, Jean."

"A canal in March!" Jean grunted. "You will end badly."

Henri looked longingly at the water.

"Had I a dry towel," he said, "I would go in again."

Jean looked at him with his one eye.

"You would be prettier without those scars," he observed. But in his heart he prayed that there might be no others added to them, that nothing might mar or destroy that bright and youthful body.

"*Dépêchez-vous! Vous sommes pressés!*" he added.

But Henri was minded to play. He girded himself with the towel and struck an attitude.

"The Russian ballet, Jean!" he said, and capering madly sent Jean into deep grumbles of laughter by his burlesque.

"I must have exercise," Henri said at last when, breathless and with flying hair, he began to dress. "That, too, is my English schooling. If you, Jean ——"

"To the devil with your English schooling!" Jean remonstrated.

Henri sobered quickly after that. The exhilaration of his cold plunge was over.

"The American lady?" he asked. "She is all right?"

"She is worried. There is not enough money."

Henri frowned.

"And I have nothing!"

This opened up an old wound with Jean.

"If you would be practical and take pay for what you are doing," he began.

Henri cut him short.

"Pay!" he said. "What is there to pay me with? And what is the use of reopening the matter? A man

may be a spy for love of his country. God knows there is enough lying and deceit in the business. But to be a spy for money — never!"

There was a little silence. Then: "Now for mademoiselle," said Henri. "She must be out of the village to-night. And that, dear friend, must be your affair. She does not like me."

All the life had gone out of his voice.

XV

"BUT why should I go?" Sara Lee asked. "It is kind of you to ask me, Jean. But I am here to work, not to play."

Long ago Sara Lee had abandoned her idea of Jean as a paid chauffeur. She even surmised, from something Marie had said, that he had been a person of importance in the Belgium of before the war. So she was grateful, but inclined to be obstinate.

"You have been so much alone, mademoiselle ——"

"Alone!"

"Cut off from your own kind. And now and then one finds, at the hotel in Dunkirk, some English nurses who are having a holiday. You would like to talk to them perhaps."

"Jean," she said unexpectedly, "why don't you tell me the truth? You want me to leave the village to-night. Why?"

"Because, mademoiselle, there will be a bombardment."

"The village itself?"

"We expect it," he answered dryly.

Sara Lee went a little pale.

"But then I shall be needed, as I was before."

"No troops will pass through the town to-night. They will take a road beyond the fields."

"How do you know these things?" she asked, wondering. "About the troops I can understand. But the bombardment."

"There are ways of finding out, mademoiselle," he replied in his noncommittal voice. "Now, will you go?"

"May I tell Marie and René?"

"No."

"Then I shall not go. How can you think that I would consider my own safety and leave them here?"

Jean had ascertained before speaking that Marie was not in the house. As for René, he sat on the single doorstep and whittled pegs on which to hang his rifle inside the door. And as he carved he sang words of his own to the tune of Tipperary.

Inside the little *salle à manger* Jean reassured Sara Lee. It was important — vital — that René and Marie should not know far in advance of the bombardment. They were loyal, certainly, but these were his orders. In abundance of time they would be warned to leave the village.

"Who is to warn them?"

"Henri has promised, mademoiselle. And what he promises is done."

"You said this morning that he was in England."

"He has returned."

Sara Lee's heart, which had been going along merely as a matter of duty all day, suddenly began to beat faster. Her color came up, and then faded again. He had returned, and he had not come to the

little house. But then — what could Henri mean to her, his coming or his going? Was she to add to her other sins against Harvey the supreme one of being interested in Henri?

Not that she said all that, even to herself. There was a wave of gladness and then a surge of remorse. That is all. But it was a very sober Sara Lee who put on her black suit with the white collar that afternoon and ordered, by Jean's suggestion, the evening's preparations as though nothing was to happen.

She looked round her little room before she left it. It might not be there when she returned. So she placed Harvey's photograph under her mattress for safety, and rather uncomfortably she laid beside it the small ivory crucifix that Henri had found in a ruined house and brought to her. Harvey was not a Catholic. He did not believe in visualizing his religion. And she had a distinct impression that he considered such things as did so as bordering on idolatry.

Sometime after dusk that evening the ammunition train moved out. At a point a mile or so from the village a dispatch rider on a motor cycle stopped the rumbling lorry at the head of the procession and delivered a message, which the guide read by the light of a sheltered match. The train moved on, but it did not turn down to the village. It went beyond to a place of safety, and there remained for the night.

But before that time Henri, lying close in a field, had seen a skulking figure run from the road to the mill, and soon after had seen the mill wheel turn once,

describing a great arc; and on one of the wings, showing only toward the poplar trees, was a lighted lantern.

Five minutes later, exactly time enough for the train to have reached the village street, German shells began to fall in it. Henri, lying flat on the ground, swore silently and deeply.

In every land during this war there have been those who would sell their country for a price. Sometimes money. Sometimes protection. And of all betrayals that of the man who sells his own country is the most dastardly. Henri, lying face down, bit the grass beneath him in sheer rage.

One thing he had not counted on, he who foresaw most things. The miller and his son, being what they were, were cowards as well. Doubtless the mill had been promised protection. It was too valuable to the Germans to be destroyed. But with the first shot both men left the house by the mill and scurried like rabbits for the open fields.

Maurice, poor Marie's lover by now, almost trampled on Henri's prostrate body. And Henri was alone, and his work was to take them alive. They had information he must have — how the *modus vivendi* had been arranged, through what channels. And under suitable treatment they would tell.

He could not follow them through the fields. He lay still, during a fiercer bombardment than the one before, raising his head now and then to see if the little house of mercy still stood. No shells came his way, but the sky line of the village altered quickly.

The standing fragment of the church towers went early. There was much sound of falling masonry. From somewhere behind him a Belgian battery gave tongue, but not for long. And then came silence.

Henri moved then. He crept nearer the mill and nearer. And at last he stood inside and took his bearings. A lamp burned in the kitchen, showing a dirty brick floor and a littered table — such a house as men keep, untidy and unhomelike. A burnt kettle stood on the hearth, and leaning against the wall was the bag of grain Maurice had carried from the crossroads.

"A mill which grinds without grain," Henri said to himself.

There was a boxed-in staircase to the upper floor, and there, with the door slightly ajar, he stationed himself, pistol in hand. Now and then he glanced uneasily at the clock. Sara Lee must not be back before he had taken his prisoners to the little house and turned them over to those who waited there.

There were footsteps outside, and Henri drew the door a little closer. But he was dismayed to find it Marie. She crept in, a white and broken thing, and looked about her.

"Maurice!" she called.

She sat down for a moment, and then, seeing the disorder about her, set to work to clear the table. It was then that Henri lowered his pistol and opened the door.

"Don't shriek, Marie," he said.

She turned and saw him, and clutched at the table.

"Monsieur!"

"Marie," he said quietly, "go up these stairs and remain quiet. Do not walk round. And do not come down, no matter what you hear!"

She obeyed him, stumbling somewhat. For she had seen his revolver, and it frightened her. But as she passed him she clutched at his sleeve.

"He is good — Maurice," she said, gasping. "Of the father I know nothing, but Maurice ——"

"Go up and be silent!" was all he said.

Now, by all that goes to make a story, Sara Lee should have met Mabel at the Hôtel des Arcades in Dunkirk, and should have been able to make that efficient young woman burn with jealousy — Mabel, who from the safety of her hospital in Boulogne considered Dunkirk the Front.

Indeed Sara Lee, to whom the world was beginning to seem very small, had had some such faint hope. But Mabel was not there, and it was not until long after that they met at all, and then only when the lights had gone down and Sara Lee was again knitting by the fire.

There were a few nurses there, in their white veils with the red cross over the forehead, and one or two Englishwomen in hats that sat a trifle too high on the tops of their heads and with long lists before them which they checked as they ate. Aviators in leather coats; a few Spahis in cloak and turban, with full-gathered bloomers and high boots; some American ambulance drivers, rather noisy and very young; and

many officers, in every uniform of the Allied armies — sat at food together and for a time forgot their anxieties under the influence of lights, food and warmth, and red and white wine mixed with water.

When he chose, Jean could be a delightful companion; not with Henri's lift of spirits, but quietly interesting. And that evening he was a new Jean to Sara Lee, a man of the world, talking of world affairs. He found her apt and intelligent, and for Sara Lee much that had been clouded cleared up forever that night. Until then she had known only the humanities of the war, or its inhumanities. There, over that little table, she learned something of its politics and its inevitability. She had been working in the dark, with her heart only. Now she began to grasp the real significance of it all, of Belgium's anxiety for many years, of Germany's cold and cruel preparation, and empty protests of friendship. She learned of the flight of the government from Brussels, the most important state papers being taken away in a hand cart, on top of which, at the last moment, some flustered official had placed a tall silk hat! She learned of the failure of great fortifications before the invaders' heavy guns And she had drawn for her such a picture of Albert of Belgium as she was never to forget.

Perhaps Sara Lee's real growth began that night, over that simple dinner at the Hôtel des Arcades.

"I wish," she said at last, "that Uncle James could have heard all this. He was always so puzzled about it all. And — you make it so clear."

When dinner was over a bit of tension had relaxed in her somewhat. She had been too close, for too long. And when a group of Belgian officers, learning who she was, asked to be presented and gravely thanked her, she flushed with happiness.

"We must see if mademoiselle shall not have a medal," said the only one who spoke English.

"A medal? For what?"

"For courage," he said, bowing. "Belgium has little to give, but it can at least do honor to a brave lady."

Jean was smiling when they passed on. What a story would this slip of a girl take home with her!

But: "I don't think I want a medal, Jean," she said. "I didn't come for that. And after all it is you and Henri who have done the thing — not I."

Accustomed to women of a more sophisticated class, Jean had at first taken her naïveté for the height of subtlety. He was always expecting her to betray herself. But after that evening with her he changed. Just such simplicity had been his wife's. Sometimes Sara Lee reminded him of her — the upraising of her eyes or an unstudied gesture.

He sighed.

"You are very wonderful, you Americans," he said. It was the nearest to a compliment that he had ever come. And after that evening he was always very gentle with her. Once he had protected her because Henri had asked him to do so; now he himself became in his silent way her protector.

The ride home through the dark was very quiet. Sara Lee sat beside him watching the stars and growing increasingly anxious as they went, not too rapidly, toward the little house. There were no lights. Air raids had grown common in Dunkirk, and there were no street lights in the little city. Once on the highway Jean lighted the lamps, but left them very low, and two miles from the little house he put them out altogether. They traveled by starlight then, following as best they could the tall trees that marked the road. Now and then they went astray at that, and once they tilted into the ditch and had hard pulling to get out.

At the top of the street Jean stopped and went on foot a little way down. He came back, with the report that new shells had made the way impassable; and again Sara Lee shivered. If the little house was gone!

But it was there, and lighted too. Through its broken shutters came the yellow glow of the oil lamp that now hung over the table in the *salle à manger*.

Whatever Jean's anxieties had been fell from him as he pushed open the door. Henri's voice was the first thing they heard. He was too much occupied to notice their approach.

So it was that Sara Lee saw, for the last time, the miller and his son, Maurice; saw them, but did not know them, for over their heads were bags of their own sacking, with eyeholes roughly cut in them. Their hands were bound, and three soldiers were waiting to take them away.

"I have covered your heads," Henri was saying in

French, " because it is not well that our brave Belgians should know that they have been betrayed by those of their own number."

It was a cold and terrible Henri who spoke.

" Take them away," he said to the waiting men.

A few moments later he turned from the door and heard Sara Lee sobbing in her room. He tapped, and on receiving no reply he went in. The room was unharmed, and by the light of a candle he saw the girl, face down on the bed. He spoke to her, but she only lay crouched deeper, her shoulders shaking.

" It is war, mademoiselle," he said, and went closer. Then suddenly all the hurt of the past days, all the bitterness of the last hour, were lost in an overwhelming burst of tenderness.

He bent over her and put his arms round her.

" That I should have hurt you so! " he said softly. " I, who would die for you, mademoiselle. I who worship you." He buried his face in the warm hollow of her neck and held her close. He was trembling. " I love you," he whispered. " I love you."

She quieted under his touch. He was very strong, and there was refuge in his arms. For a moment she lay still, happier than she had been for weeks. It was Henri who was shaken now and the girl who was still.

But very soon came the thing that, after all, he expected. She drew herself away from him, and Henri, sensitive to every gesture, stood back.

" Who are they? " was the first thing she said. It rather stabbed him. He had just told her that he

loved her, and never before in his careless young life had he said that to any woman.

"Spies," he said briefly.

A flushed and tearful Sara Lee stood up then and looked up at him gravely.

"Then — that is what you do?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Quite suddenly she went to him and held up her face.

"Please kiss me, Henri," she said very simply. "I have been cruel and stupid, and ——"

But he had her in his arms then, and he drew her close as though he would never let her go. He was one great burst of joy, poor Henri. But when she gently freed herself at last it was to deliver what seemed for a time his death wound.

"You have paid me a great tribute," she said, still simply and gravely. "I wanted you to kiss me, because of what you said. But that will have to be all, Henri dear."

"All?" he said blankly.

"You haven't forgotten, have you? I — I am engaged to somebody else."

Henri stood still, swaying a little.

"And you love him? More than you care for me?"

"He is — he is my kind," said Sara Lee rather pitifully. "I am not what you think me. You see me here, doing what you think is good work, and you are grateful. And you don't see any other women. So I ——"

"And you think I love you because I see no one else?" he demanded, still rather stunned.

"Isn't that part of it?"

He flung out his hands as though he despaired of making her understand.

"This man at home——" he said bitterly; "this man who loves you so well that he let you cross the sea and come here alone — do you love him very dearly?"

"I am promised to him."

All at once Sara Lee saw the little parlor at home, and Harvey, gentle, rather stolid and dependable. Oh, very dependable. She saw him as he had looked the night he had said he loved her, rather wistful and very, very tender. She could not hurt him so. She had said she was going back to him, and she must go.

"I love him very much, Henri."

Very quietly, considering the hell that was raging in him, Henri bent over and kissed her hand. Then he turned it over, and for an instant he held his cheek against its warmth. He went out at once, and Sara Lee heard the door slam.

XVI

TIME passed quickly, as always it does when there is work to do. Round the ruined houses the gray grass turned green again, and in travesties of gardens early spring flowers began to show a touch of color.

The first of them greeted Sara Lee one morning as she stood on her doorstep in the early sun. She gathered them and placed them, one on each grave, in the cemetery near the poplar trees, where small wooden crosses, sometimes surmounted by a cap, marked many graves.

Marie, a silent subdued Marie, worked steadily in the little house. She did not weep, but now and then Sara Lee found her stirring something on the stove and looking toward the quiet mill in the fields. And once Sara Lee, surprising that look on her face, put her arms about the girl and held her for a moment. But she did not say anything. There was nothing to say.

With the opening up of the spring came increased movement and activity among the troops. The beach and the sand dunes round La Panne were filled with drilling men, Belgium's new army. Veterans of the winter, at rest behind the lines, sat in the sun and pared potatoes for the midday meal. Convalescents from the hospital appeared in motley garments from

the Ambulance Ocean and walked along the water front, where the sea, no longer gray and sullen, rolled up in thin white lines of foam to their very feet. Winter straw came out of wooden sabots. Winter-bitten hands turned soft. Canal boats blossomed out with great washings. And the sentry at the gun emplacement in the sand up the beach gave over gathering sticks for his fire, and lay, when no one was about, in a hollow in the dune, face to the sky.

So spring came to that small fragment of Belgium which had been saved — spring and hope. Soon now the great and powerful Allies would drive out the Huns, and all would be as it had been. Splendid rumors were about. The Germans were already yielding at La Bassée. There was to be a great drive along the entire Front, and hopefully one would return home in time for the spring planting.

A sort of informal council took place occasionally in the little house. Maps replaced the dressings on the table in the *salle à manger*, and junior officers, armed with Sara Lee's box of pins, thrust back the enemy at various points and proved conclusively that his position was untenable. They celebrated these paper victories with Sara Lee's tea, and went away the better for an hour or so of hope and tea and a girl's soft voice and quiet eyes.

Now and then there was one, of course, who lagged behind his fellows, with a yearning tenderness in his face that a glance from the girl would have quickly turned to love. But Sara Lee had no coquetry.

When, as occasionally happened, there was a bit too much fervor when her hand was kissed, she laid it where it belonged — to loneliness and the spring — and became extremely maternal and very, very kind. Which — both of them — are death blows to young love.

The winter floods were receding. Along the Yser Canal mud-caked flats began to appear, with here and there rusty tangles of barbed wire. And with the lessening of the flood came new activities to the little house. The spring drive was coming.

There was spring indeed, everywhere but in Henri's heart.

Day after day messages were left with Sara Lee by men in uniform — sometimes letters, sometimes a word. And these she faithfully cared for until such time as Jean came for them. Now and then it was Henri who came, but when he stayed in the village he made his headquarters at the house of the mill. There, with sacking over the windows, he wrote his reports by lamplight, reports which Jean carried back to the villa in the fishing village by the sea.

However, though he no longer came and went as before, Henri made frequent calls at the house of mercy. But now he came in the evenings, when the place was full of men. Sara Lee was doing more dressings than before. The semi-armistice of winter was over, and there were nights when a row of wounded men lay on the floor in the little *salle à manger* and waited, in a sort of dreadful quiet, to be taken away.

Rumors came of hard fighting farther along the line, and sometimes, on nights when the clouds hung low, the flashes of the guns at Ypres looked like incessant lightning. From the sand dunes at Nieuport and Dixmude there was firing also, and the air seemed sometimes to be full of scouting planes.

The Canadians were moving toward the Front at Neuve Chapelle at that time. And one day a lorry, piled high with boxes, rolled and thumped down the street, and halted by René.

"Rather think we are lost," explained the driver, grinning sheepishly at René.

There were four boys in khaki on the truck, and not a word of French among them. Sara Lee, who rolled her own bandages now, heard the speech and came out.

"Good gracious!" she said, and gave an alarmed glance at the sky. But it was the noon hour, when every good German abandons war for food, and the sky was empty.

The boys cheered perceptibly. Here was at last some one who spoke a Christian tongue.

"Must have taken the wrong turning, miss," said one of them, saluting.

"Where do you want to go?" she asked. "You are very close to the Belgian Front here. It is not at all safe."

They all saluted; then, staring at her curiously, told her.

"Dear me!" said Sara Lee. "You are a long way off. And a long way from home too."

They smiled. They looked, with their clean-haven faces, absurdly young after the bearded Belgian soldiers.

"I am an American, too," said Sara Lee with just a touch of homesickness in her voice. She had been feeling lonely lately. "If you have time to come in I could give you luncheon. René can tell us if any German air machines come over."

Would they come in? Indeed, yes! They crawled down off the lorry, and took off their caps, and ate every particle of food in the house. And, though they were mutely curious at first, soon they were asking questions. How long had she been there? What did she do? Wasn't it dangerous?

"Not so dangerous as it looks," said Sara Lee, smiling. "The Germans seldom bother the town now. It is not worth while."

Later on they went over the house. They climbed the broken staircase and stared toward the break in the poplar trees, from the roofless floor above.

"Some girl!" one of them said in an undertone.

The others were gazing intently toward the Front. Never before had they been so close. Never had they seen a ruined town. War, until now, had been a thing of Valcartier, of a long voyage, of much drill in the mud at Salisbury Plain. Now here they saw, at their feet, what war could do.

"Damn them!" said one of the boys suddenly. "Fellows, we'll get back at them soon."

So they went away, a trifle silent and very grateful.

But before they left they had a glimpse of Sara Lee's room, with the corner gone, and Harvey's picture on the mantel.

"Some girl!" they repeated as they drove up the street. It was the tribute of inarticulate youth.

Sara Lee went back to her bandages and her thoughts. She had not a great deal of time to think, what with the officers stopping in to fight their paper-and-pin battles, and with letters to write and dressings to make and supplies to order. She began to have many visitors — officers from the French lines, correspondents on tours of the Front, and once even an English cabinet member, who took six precious lumps of sugar in his tea and dug a piece of shell out of the wall with his pocketknife as a souvenir.

Once a British aviator brought his machine down in the field by the mill, and walked over with the stiff stride of a man who has been for hours in the air. She gave him tea and bread and butter, and she learned then of the big fighting that was to come.

When she was alone she thought about Henri. Generally her thoughts were tender; always they were grateful. But she was greatly puzzled. He had said that he loved her. Then, if he loved her, why should he not be gentle and kind to her? Men did not hurt the women they loved. And because she was hurt, she was rather less than just. He had not asked her to marry him. He had said that he loved her, but that was different. And the insidious poison of Harvey's letter about foreigners began to have its effect.

The truth was that she was tired. The strain was telling on her. And at a time when she needed every moral support Henri had drawn off behind a wall of misery, and all her efforts at a renewal of their old friendship only brought up against a sort of stony despair.

There were times, too, when she grew a little frightened. She was so alone. What if Henri went away altogether? What if he took away the little car, and his protection, and the supplies that came so regularly? It was not a selfish fear. It was for her work that she trembled.

For the first time she realized her complete dependence on his good will. And now and then she felt that it would be good to see Harvey again, and be safe from all worry, and not have to depend on a man who loved her as Henri did. For that she never doubted. Inexperienced as she was in such matters, she knew that the boy loved her. Just how wildly she did not know until later, too late to undo what the madness had done.

Then one day a strange thing happened. It had been raining, and when in the late afternoon the sun came out it gleamed in the puddles that filled the shell holes in the road and set to a red blaze the windows of the house of the mill.

First, soaring overhead, came a half dozen friendly planes. Next, the eyes of the enemy having thus been blinded, so to speak, there came a regiment of fresh troops, swinging down the street for all the world as

though the German Army was safely drinking beer in Munich. They passed René, standing open-mouthed in the doorway, and one wag of a Belgian boy, out of sheer joy of spring, did the goose step as he passed the little sentry and, head screwed round in the German salute, crossed his eyes over his impudent nose.

Came, then, the planes. Came the regiment, which turned off into a field and there spread itself, like a snake uncoiling, into a double line. Came a machine, gray and battered, containing officers. Came a general with gold braid on his shoulder, and a pleasant smile. Came the strange event.

The general found Sara Lee in the *salle à manger* cutting cotton into three-inch squares, and he stood in the doorway and bowed profoundly.

"Mademoiselle Kennedy?" he inquired.

Sara Lee replied to that, and then gave a quick thought to her larder. Because generals usually meant tea. But this time at last Sara Lee was to receive something, not to give. She turned very white when she was told, and said she had not deserved it; she was indeed on the verge of declining, not knowing that there are certain things one does not decline. But Marie brought her hat and jacket — a smiling, tremulous Marie — and Sara Lee put them on.

The general was very tall. In her short skirt and with flying hair she looked like a child beside him as they walked across the fields. Suddenly Sara Lee was terribly afraid she was going to cry.

The troops stood rigidly at attention. And a cold

wind flapped Sara Lee's skirts, and the guns hammered at Ypres, and the general blew on his fingers. And soon a low open car came down the street and the King got out. Sara Lee watched him coming — his tall, slightly stooped figure, his fair hair, his plain blue uniform. Sara Lee had never seen a king before, and she had always thought of them as sitting up on a sort of platform — never as trudging through spring mud.

"What shall I do?" she asked nervously.

"He will shake hands, mademoiselle. Bow as he approaches. That is all."

The amazing interlude, indeed! With Sara Lee being decorated by the King, and troops drawn up to do her honor, and over all the rumbling of the great guns. A palpitating and dazed Sara Lee, when the decoration was fastened to her black jacket, a Sara Lee whose hat blew off at exactly the worst moment and rolled, end on, like a hoop, into a puddle.

But, oddly, she did not mind about the hat. She had only one conscious thought just then. She hoped that, wherever Uncle James might be in that world of the gone before, he might know what was happening to her — or even see it. He would have liked it. He had believed in the Belgians and in the King. And now ——

The King did not go at once. He went back to the little house and went through it. And he and one of his generals climbed to the upper floor, and the King stood looking out silently toward the land he loved and which for a time was no longer his.

He came down after a time, stooping his tall figure in the low doorway, and said he would like some tea. So Marie put the kettle on, and Sara Lee and the King talked. It was all rather dazing. Every now and then she forgot certain instructions whispered her by the general, and after a time the King said: "Why do you do that, mademoiselle?"

For Sara Lee, with an intent face and moving lips, had been stepping backward.

Sara Lee flushed to the eyes.

"Because, sire, I was told to remain at a distance of six feet."

"But we are being informal," said the King, smiling. "And it is a very little room."

Sara Lee, who had been taught in the schoolroom that kings are usurpers of the divine rights of the people — Sara Lee lost just a bit of her staunch democracy that day. She saw the King of the Belgians for what he really was, a ruler, but a symbol as well. He represented his country, as the Flag she loved represented hers. The flag was America, the King was Belgium. That was all.

It was a very humble and flushed Sara Lee who watched the gray car go flying up the street later on. She went in and told the whole story to Harvey's picture, but it was difficult to feel that he was hearing. His eyes were turned away and his face was set and stern. And at last she gave it up. This thing which meant so much to her would never mean anything to Harvey. She knew, even then, what he would say.

"Decorate you! I should think they might. Medals are cheap. Everybody over there is getting medals. You feed their men and risk your life and your reputation, and they give you a thing to pin on. It's cheap at the price."

And later on those were Harvey's very words. But to be fair to him they were but the sloughing of a wound that would not heal.

That evening Henri came again. He was, for the first time, his gay self again — at least on the surface. It was as though, knowing what he was going into, he would leave with Sara Lee no feeling, if he never returned, that she had inflicted a lasting hurt. He was everywhere in the little house, elbowing his way among the men with his cheery nonsense, bantering the weary ones until they smiled, carrying hot water for Sara Lee and helping her now and then with a bad dressing.

"If you would do it in this fashion, mademoiselle," he would say, "with one turn of the bandage over the elbow ——"

"But it won't hold that way."

"You say that to me, mademoiselle? I who have taught you all you know of bandaging?"

They would wrangle a bit, and end by doing it in Sara Lee's way.

He had a fund of nonsense that he drew on, too, when a dressing was painful. It would run like this, to an early accompaniment of groans:

"Pierre, what can you put in your left hand that

you cannot place in the right? Stop grunting like a pig, and think, man!"

Pierre would give a final rumble and begin to think deeply.

"I cannot think. I — in my left hand, *monsieur le capitaine?*"

"In your left hand."

The little crowd in the dressing room would draw in close about the table to listen.

"I do not know, monsieur."

"Idiot!" Henri would say. "Your right elbow, man!"

And the dressing was done.

He had an inexhaustible stock of such riddles, almost never guessed. He would tell the answer and then laugh delightedly. And pain seemed to leave the little room when he entered it.

It was that night that Henri disappeared.

XVII

THERE was a question to settle, and it was for Henri to do it. Two questions indeed. One was a matter of engineering, and before the bottom fell out of his world Henri had studied engineering. The second was more serious.

For the first, this thing had happened. Of all the trenches to be held, the Belgians had undeniably the worst. Properly speaking they were not trenches at all, but shallow gutters dug a foot or two into the saturated ground and then built man-high with bags of earth or sand. Here and there they were not dug at all, but were purely shelters, against a railway embankment, of planks or sandbags, and reënforced by rails from the deserted track behind which they were hidden.

For this corner of Belgium had been saved by turning it into a shallow lake. By opening the gates in the dikes the Allies had let in the sea and placed a flood in front of the advancing enemy. The battle front was a reeking pond. The opposing armies lived like duck hunters in a swamp. To dig a foot was to encounter water. Machine guns here and there sat but six inches above the yellow flood. Men lay in pools to fire them. To reach outposts were narrow paths built first of bags of earth — a life sometimes for every bag. And,

when this filling was sufficient, on top a path of fascines, bound together in bundles, made a footway.

For this reason the Belgians approached their trenches not through deep cuts which gave them shelter but with no other cover than the darkness of night. During the day they lay in their shallow dugouts, cut off from any connection with the world behind them. Food, cooked miles away, came up at night, cold and unappetizing. For water, having exhausted their canteens, there was nothing but the brackish tide before them, ill smelling and reeking of fever. Water carts trundled forward at night, but often they were far too few.

The Belgians, having faced their future through long years of anxiety, had been trained to fight. In a way they had been trained to fight a losing war, for they could not hope to defeat their greedy neighbor on the east. But now they found themselves fighting almost not at all, condemned to inactivity, to being almost passively slaughtered by enemy artillery, and to living under such conditions as would have sapped the courage of a less desperate people.

To add to the difficulties, not only did the sea encroach, turning a fertile land into a salt marsh, but the winter rains, unusually heavy that tragic first winter, and lacking their usual egress to the sea, spread the flood. There were many places well back of the lines where fields were flooded, and where roads, sadly needed, lost themselves in unfordable wallows of mud and water.

Henri then, knowing all this — none better — had his first question to settle, which was this: As spring advanced the flood had commenced to recede. Time came when, in those trenches now huddled shallow behind the railway track, one could live in a certain comfort. In the deeper ones the bottom of the trench appeared for the first time.

On a day previous, however, the water had commenced to come back. There had been no rain, but little by little in a certain place yellow, ill-smelling little streams began to flow sluggishly into the trenches. Seeped, rather than flowed. At first the Belgian officers laid it to that bad luck that had so persistently pursued them. Then they held a conference in the small brick house with its maps and its pine tables and its picture of an American harvester on the wall, which was now headquarters.

Sitting under the hanging lamp, with an orderly making coffee at a stove in the corner, they talked it over. Henri was there, silent before his elders, but intently listening. And at last they turned to him.

"I can go and find out," he said quietly. "It is possible, though I do not see how." He smiled. "They are, I think, only drying themselves at our expense. It is a bit of German humor."

But the cry of "Calais in a month!" was in the air, and undoubtedly there had been renewed activity along the German Front near the sea. The second question to be answered was dependent on the first.

Had the Germans, as Henri said, merely shifted the

water, by some clever engineering, to the Belgian trenches, or was there some bigger thing on hand? What, for instance, if they were about to attempt to drain the inundation, smash the Belgian line, and march by the Dunkirk road to Calais?

So, that night while Henri jested about Pierre's right elbow and watched Sara Lee for a smile, he had difficult work before him.

Sometime near midnight he slipped away. Jean was waiting in the street, and wrung the boy's hand.

"I could go with you," he said rather wistfully. "I ——"

"You don't speak their ugly tongue."

"I could be mute — shell shock. You could be helping me back."

But Henri only held his hand a moment and shook his head.

"You would double the risk, and — what good would it do?"

"Two pistols are better than one."

"I have two pistols, my friend," said Henri, and turned the corner of the building, past the boards René had built in, toward the house of the mill. But once out of Jean's sight he stopped a moment, his hand resting against that frail wall to Sara Lee's room. It was his good-by to her.

For three days Jean stayed in the village. He slept at the mill, but he came for his meals to the little house. Once he went to Dunkirk and brought out provisions and the mail, including Sara Lee's monthly allowance

But mostly he sat in the mill house and waited. He could not read.

"You do not eat at all, Jean," Sara Lee said to him more than once. And twice she insisted that he was feverish, and placed a hand that was somewhat marred with much peeling of vegetables, on his forehead.

"I am entirely well, mademoiselle," he would say, and draw back. He had anxieties enough just now without being reminded by the touch of a woman's hand of all that he had lost.

Long before that Sara Lee had learned not to question Jean about Henri's absences. Even his knowledge, now, that she knew something of Henri's work, did not remove the barrier. So Sara Lee waited, as did Jean, but more helplessly. She knew something was wrong, but she had not Jean's privilege of going at night to the trenches and there waiting, staring over the gray water with its ugly floating shadows, for Henri to emerge from the flood.

Something rather forced and mechanical there was those days in her work. Her smile was rather set. She did not sleep well. And one night she violated Henri's orders and walked across the softened fields to beyond the poplar trees.

There was nothing to see except an intermittent flash from the clouds that hung low over the sea at Nieuport, where British gunboats were bombarding the coast; or the steady streaks from the Ypres salient, where night and day the guns never rested.

From the Belgian trenches, fifteen hundred feet or

so away, there was no sound. A German electric signal blazed its message in code, and went out quickly. Now and then a rifle shot, thin and sharp, rang out from where, under the floating starlights, keen eyes on each side watched for movements on the other.

Sara Lee sat down under a tree and watched for a while. Then she found herself crying softly. It was all so sad, and useless, and cruel. And somewhere there ahead was Henri, Henri with his blue eyes, his smile, the ardor of his young arms — Henri, who had been to her many friends.

Sara Lee had never deceived herself about Henri. She loved him. But she was quite certain she was not in love with him, which is entirely different. She knew that this last was impossible, because she was engaged to Harvey. What was probably the truth was that she loved them both in entirely different ways. Men have always insisted on such possibilities, and have even asserted their right, now and then, to love two women at the same time. But women are less frank with themselves.

And, in such cases, there is no grand passion. There are tenderness, and the joy of companionship, and sometimes a touching dependence. But it is not a love that burns with a white fire.

Perhaps Sara Lee was one of those women who are always loved more than they love. There are such women, not selfish, not seeking love, but softly feminine, kind, appealing and genuine. Men need, after all, but an altar on which to lay tribute. And the high,

remote white altar that was Sara Lee had already received the love of two strong men.

She was not troubling her head that night, however, about being an altar, of a sort. She cried a little at first, because she was terrified for Henri and because Jean's face was growing pinched and gray. Then she cried very hard, prone on the ground and face down, because Henri was young, and all of life should have been before him. And he was missing.

Henri was undeniably missing. Even the King knew it now, and set down in his heart, among the other crosses there, Henri's full name, which we may not know, and took to pacing his little study and looking out at the spring sea.

That night Marie, having ladled to the bottom of her kettle, found Sara Lee missing, and was told by René of the direction she had taken. Marie, muttering to herself, set out to find her, and almost stumbled over her in the wood by the road.

She sat down on the ground without a word and placed a clumsy hand on the girl's shoulder. It was not until Sara Lee ceased sobbing that she spoke:

"It is far from hopeless, mademoiselle."

They had by now established a system of communication. Sara Lee spoke her orders in halting French, but general conversation was beyond her. And much hearing of English had taught the Belgian girl enough to follow.

Sara Lee replied, then, in smothered English:

"He is gone, Marie. He will never come back."

"Who can tell? There are many missing who are not dead."

Sara Lee shuddered. For spies were not made prisoners. They had no rights as prisoners of war. Their own governments did not protect them. To Henri capture was death. But she could not say this to Marie.

Marie sat softly stroking Sara Lee's hair, her own eyes tragic and tearless.

"Even if it were — the other," she said, "it is not so bad to die for one's country. The thing that is terrible, that leaves behind it only bitterness and grief and no hope, mademoiselle, even with many prayers, is that one has died a traitor."

She coaxed Sara Lee back at last. They went through the fields, for fresh troops were being thrown into the Belgian trenches and the street was full of men. Great dray horses were dragging forward batteries, the heavy guns sliding and slipping. In the absence of such information as only Henri had been wont to bring it was best to provide for the worst.

The next day Jean did not come over for breakfast, and René handed Sara Lee a note.

"I am going to England," Jean had written that dawn in the house of the mill. "And from there to Holland. I can get past the barrier and shall work down toward the Front. I must learn what has happened, mademoiselle. As you know, if he was captured, there is no hope. But there is an excellent

chance that he is in hiding, unable to get back. Look for me in two weeks."

There followed what instructions he had given as to her supplies, which would come as before. Beautifully written in Jean's small fine hand, it spelled for Sara Lee the last hope. She read Jean's desperation through its forced cheerfulness. And she faced for the first time a long period of loneliness in the crowded little house.

She tried very hard to fill the gap that Henri had left — tried to joke with the men in her queer bits of French; was more smiling than ever, for fear she might be less. But now and then in cautious whispers she heard Henri's name, and her heart contracted with very terror.

A week. Two weeks. Twice the village was bombarded severely, but the little house escaped by a miracle. Marie considered it the same miracle that left holy pictures unhurt on the walls of destroyed houses, and allowed the frailest of old ebony and rosewood crucifixes to remain unharmed.

Great generals, often as tall as they were great, stopped at the little house to implore Sara Lee to leave. But she only shook her head.

"Not unless you send me away," she always said; "and that would break my heart."

"But to move, mademoiselle, only to the next village!" they would remonstrate, and as a final argument: "You are too valuable to risk an injury."

"I must remain here," she said. And some of them

thought they understood. When an unusually obdurate officer came along, Sara Lee would insist on taking him to the cellar.

"You see!" she would say, holding her candle high. "It is a nice cellar, warm and dry. It is"—proudly—"one of the best cellars in the village. It is a really homelike cellar."

The officer would go away then, and send her cigarettes for her men or, as in more than one case, a squad with bags of earth and other things to protect the little house as much as possible. After a time the little house began to represent the ideas in protection and camouflage, then in its early stages, of many different minds.

René shot a man there one night, a skulking figure working its way in the shadows up the street. It was just before dawn, and René, who was sleepless those days, like the others, called to him. The man started to run, dodging behind walls. But René ran faster and killed him.

He was a German in Belgian peasant's clothing. But he wore the great shoes of the German soldier, and he had been making a rough map of the Belgian trenches.

Sara Lee did not see him. But when she heard the shot she went out, and René told her breathlessly.

From that time on her terrors took the definite form of Henri lying dead in a ruined street, and being buried, as this man was buried, without ceremony and without a prayer, in some sodden spring field.

XVIII

AS the spring advanced Harvey grew increasingly bitter; grew morbid and increasingly self-conscious also. He began to think that people were smiling behind his back, and when they asked about Sara Lee he met with almost insulting brevity what he felt was half-contemptuous kindness. He went nowhere, and worked all day and until late in the night.

He did well in his business, however, and late in March he received a substantial raise in salary. He took it without enthusiasm, and told Belle that night at dinner with apathy.

After the evening meal it was now his custom to go to his room and there, shut in, to read. He read no books on the war, and even the quarter column entitled Salient Points of the Day's War News hardly received a glance from him now.

In the office when the talk turned to the war, as it did almost hourly, he would go out or scowl over his letters.

"Harvey's hit hard," they said there.

"He's acting like a rotten cub," was likely to be the next sentence. But sometimes it was: "Well, what'd you expect? Everything ready to get married, and the girl beating it for France without notice! I'd be sore myself."

On the day of the raise in salary his sister got the

children to bed and straightened up the litter of small garments that seemed always to bestrew the house, even to the lower floor. Then she went into Harvey's room. Coat and collar off, he was lying on the bed, but not reading. His book lay beside him, and with his arms under his head he was staring at the ceiling.

She did not sit down beside him on the bed. They were an undemonstrative family, and such endearments as Belle used were lavished on her children. But her eyes were kind, and a little nervous.

"Do you mind talking a little, Harvey?"

"I don't feel like talking much. I'm tired, I guess But go on. What is it? Bills?"

She came to him in her constant financial anxieties, and always he was ready to help her out. But his tone now was gruff. A slight flush of resentment colored her cheeks.

"Not this time, Harve. I was just thinking about things."

"Sit down."

She sat on the straight chair beside the bed, the chair on which, in neat order, Harvey placed his clothing at night, his shoes beneath, his coat over the back.

"I wish you'd go out more, Harvey."

"Why? Go out and talk to a lot of driveling fools who don't care for me any more than I do for them?"

"That's not like you, Harve."

"Sorry." His tone softened. "I don't care much about going round, Belle. That's all. I guess you know why."

"So does everybody else."

He sat up and looked at her.

"Well, suppose they do? I can't help that, can I? When a fellow has been jilted ——"

"You haven't been jilted."

He lay down again, his arms under his head; and Belle knew that his eyes were on Sara Lee's picture on his dresser.

"It amounts to the same thing."

"Harvey," Belle said hesitatingly, "I've brought Sara Lee's report from the Ladies' Aid. May I read it to you?"

"I don't want to hear it." Then: "Give it here. I'll look at it."

He read it carefully, his hands rather unsteady. So many men given soup, so many given chocolate. So many dressings done. And at the bottom Sara Lee's request for more money — an apologetic, rather breathless request, and closing, rather primly with this:

"I am sure that the society will feel, from the above report, that the work is worth while, and worth continuing. I am only sorry that I cannot send photographs of the men who come for aid, but as they come at night it is impossible. I enclose, however, a small picture of the house, which is now known as the little house of mercy."

"At night!" said Harvey. "So she's there alone with a lot of ignorant foreigners at night. Why the devil don't they come in the daytime?"

"Here's the picture, Harvey."

He got up then, and carried the tiny photograph over close to the gas jet. There he stood for a long time, gazing at it. There was René with his rifle and his smile. There was Marie in her white apron. And in the center, the wind blowing her soft hair, was Sara Lee.

Harvey groaned and Belle came over and putting her hand on his shoulder looked at the photograph with him.

"Do you know what I think, Harvey?" she said. "I think Sara Lee is right and you are wrong."

He turned on her almost savagely.

"That's not the point!" he snapped out. "I don't begrudge the poor devils their soup. What I feel is this: If she'd cared a tinker's dam for me she'd never have gone. That's all."

He returned to a moody survey of the picture.

"Look at it!" he said. "She insists that she's safe. But that fellow's got a gun. What for, if she's so safe? And look at that house! There's a corner shot away; and it's got no upper floor. Safe!"

Belle held out her hand.

"I must return the picture to the society, Harve."

"Not just yet," he said ominously. "I want to look at it. I haven't got it all yet. And I'll return it myself — with a short speech."

"Harvey!"

"Well," he retorted, "why shouldn't I tell that lot of old scandalmongers what I think of them? They'll sit here safe at home and beg money — God, one of

them was in the office to-day! — and send a young girl over to —— You'd better get out, Belle. I'm not company for any one to-night."

She turned away, but he came after her, and suddenly putting his arms round her he kissed her.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I'm done with wearing my heart on my sleeve. She looks happy, so I guess I can be." He released her. "Good night. I'll return the picture."

He sat up very late, alternately reading the report and looking at the picture. It was unfortunate that Sara Lee had smiled into the camera. Coupled with her blowing hair it had given her a light-heartedness, a sort of joyousness, that hurt him to the soul.

He made some mad plans after he had turned out the lights — to flirt wildly with the unattached girls he knew; to go to France and confront Sara Lee and then bring her home. Or ——

He had found a way. He lay there and thought it over, and it bore the test of the broken sleep that followed. In the morning, dressing, he wondered he had not thought of it before. He was more cheerful at breakfast than he had been for weeks.

XIX

IN the little house of mercy two weeks went by, and then a third. Soldiers marching out to the trenches sometimes wore flowers tucked gayly in their caps. More and more Allied aëroplanes were in the air. Sometimes, standing in the streets, Sara Lee saw one far overhead, while balloon-shaped clouds of bursting shells hung far below it.

Once or twice in the early morning a German plane, flying so low that one could easily see the black cross on each wing, reconnoitered the village for wagon trains or troops. Always they found it empty.

Hope had almost fled now. In the afternoons Marie went to the ruined church, and there knelt before the heap of marble and masonry that had once been the altar, and prayed. And Sara Lee, who had been brought up a Protestant and had never before entered a Catholic church, took to going there too. In some strange fashion the peace of former days seemed to cling to the little structure, roofless as it was. On quiet days it silence was deeper than elsewhere. On days of much firing the sound from within its broken walls seemed deadened, far away.

Marie burned a candle as she prayed, for that soul in purgatory which she had once loved, and now pitied. Sara Lee burned no candle, but she knelt, sometimes

beside Marie, sometimes alone, and prayed for many things: that Henri should be living, somewhere; that the war might end; that that day there would be little wounding; that some day the Belgians might go home again; and that back in America Harvey might grow to understand and forgive her. And now and then she looked into the very depths of her soul, and on those days she prayed that her homeland might, before it was too late, see this thing as she was seeing it. The wanton waste of it all, the ghastly cruelty the Germans had brought into this war.

Sara Lee's vague thinking began to crystallize. This war was not a judgment sent from on high to a sinful world. It was the wicked imposition of one nation on other nations. It was national. It was almost racial. But most of all it was a war of hate on the German side. She had never believed in hate. There were ugly passions in the world — jealousy, envy, suspicion; but not hate. The word was not in her rather limited vocabulary.

There was no hate on the part of the men she knew. The officers who stopped in on their way to and from the trenches were gentlemen and soldiers. They were determined and grave; they resented, they even loathed. But they did not hate. The little Belgian soldiers were bewildered, puzzled, desperately resentful. But of hate, as translated into terms of frightfulness, they had no understanding.

Yet from the other side were coming methods of war so wantonly cruel, so useless save as inflicting need-

less agony, as only hate could devise. No strategic value justified them. They were spontaneous outgrowths of venom, nursed during the winter deadlock and now grown to full size and destructive power.

The rumor of a gas that seared and killed came to the little house as early as February. In March there came the first victims, poor writhing creatures, deprived of the boon of air, their seared lungs collapsed and agonized, their faces drawn into masks of suffering. Some of them died in the little house, and even after death their faces held the imprint of horror.

To Sara Lee, burying her own anxiety under the cloak of service, there came new and terrible thoughts. This was not war. The Germans had sent their clouds of poisoned gas across the inundation, but had made no attempt to follow. This was killing, for the lust of killing; suffering, for the joy of inflicting pain.

And a day or so later she heard of The Hague Convention. She had not known of it before. Now she learned of that gentlemen's agreement among nations, and that it said: "The use of poison or of poisoned weapons is forbidden." She pondered that carefully, trying to think dispassionately. Now and then she received a copy of a home newspaper, and she saw that the use of poison gases was being denied by Germans in America and set down to rumor and hysteria.

So, on a cold spring day, she sat down at the table in the *salle à manger* and wrote a letter to the President, beginning "*Dear Sir*"; and telling what she knew of poison gas. She also, on second thought, wrote

one to Andrew Carnegie, who had built a library in her city. She felt that the expense to him of sending some one over to investigate would not be prohibitive, and something must be done.

She never heard from either of her letters, but she felt better for having written them. And a day or two later she received from Mrs. Travers, in England, a small supply of the first gas masks of the war. Simple and primitive they were, those first masks; useless, too, as it turned out — a square of folded gauze, soaked in some solution and then dried, with tapes to tie it over the mouth and nose. To adjust them the soldiers had but to stoop and wet them in the ever-present water in the trench, and then to tie them on.

Sara Lee gave them out that night, and there was much mirth in the little house, such mirth as there had not been since Henri went away. The Belgians called it a *bal masque,* and putting them on bowed before one another and requested dances, and even flirted coyly with each other over their bits of white gauze. And in the very middle of the gayety some one propounded one of Henri's idiotic riddles; and Sara Lee went across to her little room and closed the door and stood there with her eyes shut, for fear she would scream.

Then, one day, coming out of the little church, she saw the low broken gray car turn in at the top of the street and come slowly, so very slowly, toward her. There were two men in it.

One was Henri.

She ran, stumbling because of tears, up the street. It was Henri! There was no mistake. There he sat beside Jean, brushed and very neat; and very, very white.

"Mademoiselle!" he said, and came very close to crying himself when he saw her face. He was greatly excited. His sunken eyes devoured her as she ran toward him. Almost he held out his arms. But he could not do that, even if he would, for one was bandaged to his side.

It is rather sad to record how many times Sara Lee wept during her amazing interlude. For here is another time. She wept for joy and wretchedness. She stood on the running board and cried and smiled. And Jean winked his one eye rapidly.

"This idiot, mademoiselle," he said gruffly, "this maniac — he would not remain in Calais, with proper care. He must come on here. And rapidly. Could he have taken the wheel from me we should have been here an hour ago. But for once I have an advantage."

The car jolted to the little house, and Jean helped Henri out. Such a strange Henri, smiling and joyous, and walking at a crawl, even with Jean's support. He protested violently against being put to bed, and when he found himself led into Sara Lee's small room he openly rebelled.

"Never!" he said stubbornly, halting in the doorway. "This is mademoiselle's boudoir. Her — drawing-room as well. I am going to the mill house and ——"

He staggered.

So Sara Lee's room had a different occupant for a time, a thin and fine-worn young Belgian, who yielded to Sara Lee when Jean gave up in despair, and who proceeded, most unmanfully, to faint as soon as he was between the blankets.

If Sara Lee hoped to nurse Henri she was doomed to disappointment. Jean it was who took over the care of the boy, a Jean who now ate prodigiously, and whistled occasionally, and slept at night robed in his blanket on the floor beside Henri's bed, lest that rebellious invalid get up and try to move about.

On the first night, with the door closed, against Henri's entreaties, while the little house received its evening complement of men, and with Henri lying back on his pillows, fresh dressed as to the wounds in his arm and chest, fed with Sara Lee's daintiest, and resting, Jean found the boy's eyes resting on the mantel.

"Dear and obstinate friend," said Henri, "do you wish me to be happy?"

"You shall not leave the room or your bed. That is arranged for."

"How?" demanded Henri with interest.

"Because I have hidden away your trousers."

Henri laughed, but he sobered quickly.

"If you wish me to be happy," he said, "take away that American photograph. But first, please to bring it here."

Jean brought it, holding it gingerly between his

thumb and forefinger. And Henri lay back and studied it.

"It is mademoiselle's fiancé," he said.

Jean grunted.

"Look at it, Jean," Henri said in his half-bantering tone, with despair beneath it; "and then look at me. Or no — remembering me as I was when I was a man. He is better, eh? It is a good face. But there is a jaw, a —— Do you think he will be kind to her as she requires? She requires much kindness. Some women ——"

He broke off and watched Jean anxiously.

"A half face!" Jean said scornfully. "The pretty-view! As for kindness ——" He put the photograph face down on the table. "I knew once a man in Belgium who married an American. At Antwerp. They were most unhappy."

Henri smiled.

"You are lying," he said with boyish pleasure in his own astuteness. "You knew no such couple. You are trying to make me resigned."

But quite a little later, when Jean thought he was asleep, he said: "I shall never be resigned."

So at last spring had come, and Henri and the great spring drive. The Germans had not drained the inundation, nor had they broken through to Calais. And it is not to be known here how much this utter failure had been due to the information Henri had secured before he was wounded.

One day in his bed Henri received a visit from the King, and was left lying with a decoration on his breast and a beatific, if somewhat sheepish, expression on his face. And one night the village was bombarded, and on Henri's refusing to be moved to the cellar Sara Lee took up a determined stand in his doorway, until at last he made a most humiliating move for safety.

Bit by bit Sara Lee got the story, its bare detail from Henri, its courage and sheer recklessness from Jean. It would, for instance, run like this, with Henri in a chair perhaps, and cutting dressings — since that might be done with one hand — and Sara Lee, sleeves rolled up and a great bowl of vegetables before her:

"And when you got through the water, Henri?" she would ask. "What then?"

"It was quite simple. They had put up some additional wire, however ——"

"Where?"

"There was a break," he would explain. "I have told you — between their trenches. I had used it before to get through."

"But how could you go through?"

"Like a snake," he would say, smiling. "Very flat and wriggling. I have eaten of the dirt, mademoiselle."

Then he would stop and cut, very awkwardly, with his left hand.

"Go on," she would prompt him. "But they had put barbed wire there. Is that it? So you could not get through?"

"With tin cans on it, and stones in the cans. I thought I had removed them all, but there was one left. So they heard me."

More cutting and a muttered French expletive. Henri was not a particularly patient cripple. And apparently there was an end to the story.

"For goodness' sake," Sara Lee would exclaim despairingly; "so they heard you! That isn't all, is it?"

"It was almost all," he would say with his boyish smile.

"And they shot at you?"

"Even better. They shot me. That was this one." And he would point to his arm.

More silence, more cutting, a gathering exasperation on Sara Lee's part.

"Are you going on or not?"

"Then I pretended to be one of them, mademoiselle. I speak German as French. I pretended not to be hurt, but to be on a reconnoissance. And I got into the trench and we had a talk in the darkness. It was most interesting. Only if they had shown a light they would have seen that I was wounded."

By bits, not that day, but after many days, she got the story. In the next trench he slipped a sling over the wounded arm and, as a Bavarian on his way to the dressing station, got back.

"I had some trouble," he confessed one day. "Now and then one would offer to go back with me. And I did not care for assistance!"

But sometime later there was trouble. She was

four days getting to that part of it. He had got behind the lines by that time, and he knew that in some way suspicion had been roused. He was weak by that time, and could not go far. He had lain hidden, for a day and part of a night, without water, in a destroyed barn, and then had escaped.

He got into the Belgian costume as before, but he could not wear a sling for his wounded arm. He got the peasant to thrust his helpless right hand into his pocket, and for two days he made a close inspection of what was going on. But fever had developed, and on the third night, half delirious, when he was spoken to by an officer he had replied, of all tongues, in English.

The officer shot him instantly in the chest. He fell and lay still and the officer bent over him. In that moment Henri stabbed him with a knife in his left hand. Men were coming from every direction, but he got away — he did not clearly remember how. And at dawn he fell into the Belgian farmhouse, apparently dying.

Jean's story, on the other hand, was given early and with no hesitation. He had crossed the border at Holland in civilian clothes, by the simple expedient of bribing a sentry. He had got, with little difficulty, to the farmhouse, and found Henri, now recovering but very weak; he was lying hidden in a garret, and he was suffering from hunger and lack of medical attention. In a wagon full of market stuff, Henri hidden in the bed of it, they had got to the border again. And there

Jean had, it seemed, stabbed the sentry he had bribed before and driven on to neutral soil.

Not an unusual story, that of Henri and Jean. The journey across Belgium in the springless farm wagon was the worst. They had had to take roundabout lanes, avoiding the main highways. Fortunately, always at night there were friendly houses, kind hands to lift Henri into warm fire-lighted interiors. Many messages they had brought back, some of cheer, but too often of tragedy, from the small farmsteads of Belgium.

Then finally had been Holland, and the chartering of a boat — and at last ——

"Here we are, and here we are, and here we are again," sang Henri, chopping at his cotton and making a great show of cheerfulness before Sara Lee.

But with Jean sometimes he showed the black depression beneath. He would never be a man again. He was done for. He gained strength so slowly that he believed he was not gaining at all. He was not happy, and the unhappy mend slowly.

After the time he had asked Jean to take away Harvey's photograph he did not recur to the subject, but he did not need to. Jean knew, perhaps even better than Henri himself, that the boy was recklessly, hopelessly, not quite rationally in love with the American girl.

Also Henri was fretting about his work. Sometimes at night, following Henri's instructions, Jean wandered quietly along roads and paths that paralleled

the Front. At such times his eyes were turned, not toward the trenches, but toward that flat country which lay behind, still dotted at that time with groves of trees, with canals overhung with pollard willows, and with here and there a farmhouse that at night took on in the starlight the appearance of being whole again. Singularly white and peaceful were those small steadings of Belgium in the night hours — until cruel dawn showed them for what they were — skeletons of dead homes, clothed only at night with wraithlike roofs and chimneys; ghosts of houses, appearing between midnight and cock crow.

Jean had not Henri's eyes nor his recklessness nor his speed, for that matter. Now and then he saw the small appearing and disappearing lights on some small rise. He would reach the spot, with such shelter as possible, to find only a sugar-beet field, neglected and unplowed.

Then, one night, tragedy came to the little house of mercy.

XX

HARVEY proceeded to put his plan into effect at once, with the simple method of an essentially simple nature. The thing had become intolerable; therefore it must end.

On the afternoon following his talk with Belle he came home at three o'clock. Belle heard him moving about in his room, and when she entered it, after he had gone, she found that he had shaved and put on his best suit.

She smiled a little. It was like Harvey to be literal. He had said he was going to go round and have a good time, and he was losing no time. But in their restricted social life, where most of the men worked until five o'clock or even later, there were few afternoon calls paid. Belle wondered with mild sisterly curiosity into what arena Harvey was about to fling his best hat.

But though Harvey paid a call that afternoon it was not on any of the young women he knew. He went to see Mrs. Gregory. She was at home — he had arranged for that by telephone — and the one butler of the neighborhood admitted him. It was a truculent young man, for all his politeness, who confronted Mrs. Gregory in her drawing-room — a quietly truculent young man, who came to the point while he was still shaking hands.

"You're not going to be glad to see me in a minute," he said in reply to her greeting.

"How can you know that?"

"Because I've come to get you to do something you won't want to do."

"We won't quarrel before we begin, then," she said pleasantly. "Because I really never do anything I don't wish to do."

But she gave him a second glance and her smile became a trifle forced. She knew all about Harvey and Sara Lee. She had heard rumors of his disapproval also. Though she was not a clever nor a very keen woman, she saw what was coming and braced herself for it.

Harvey had prepared in his mind a summary of his position, and he delivered it with the rapidity and strength of a blow.

"I know all about the Belgians, Mrs. Gregory," he said. "I'm sorry for them. So is every one, I suppose. But I want to know if you think a girl of twenty ought to be over there practically at the Front, and alone?" He gave her time to reply. "Would you like to have your daughter there, if you had one?"

"Perhaps not, under ordinary circumstances. But this is war ——"

"It is not our war."

"Humanity," said Mrs. Gregory, remembering the phrase she had written for a speech —"humanity has no nationality. It is of all men, for all men."

"That's men. Not women!"

He got up and stood on the hearthrug. He was singularly reminiscent of the time he had stood on Aunt Harriet's white fur rug and had told Sara Lee she could not go.

"Now see here, Mrs. Gregory," he said, "we'll stop beating about the bush, if you don't mind. She's got to come home. She's coming, if I have to go and get her!"

"You needn't look at me so fiercely. I didn't send her. It was her own idea."

Harvey sneered.

"No," he said slowly. "But I notice your society publishes her reports in the papers, and that the names of the officers are rarely missing."

Mrs. Gregory colored.

"We must have publicity to get money," she said. "It is hard to get. Sometimes I have had to make up the deficit out of my own pocket."

"Then for God's sake bring her home! If the thing has to go on, send over there some of the middle-aged women who have no ties. Let 'em get shot if they want to. They can write as good reports as she can, if that's all you want. And make as good soup," he added bitterly.

"It could be done, of course," she said, thoughtfully. "But — I must tell you this: I doubt if an older woman could have got where she has. There is no doubt that her charm, her youth and beauty have helped her greatly. We cannot ——"

The very whites of his eyes turned red then. He

shouted furiously that for their silly work and their love of publicity, they were trading on a girl's youth and beauty; that if anything happened to her he would publish the truth in every newspaper in the country; that they would at once recall Sara Lee or he would placard the city with what they were doing. These were only a few of the things he threw at her.

When he was out of breath he jerked the picture of the little house of mercy out of his pocket and flung it into her lap.

"There!" he said. "Do you know where that house is? It's in a ruined village. She hasn't said that, has she? Well, look at the masonry there. That's a shell hole in the street. That soldier's got a gun. Why? Because the Germans may march up that street any day on their way to Calais."

Mrs. Gregory looked at the picture. Sara Lee smiled into the sun. And René, ignorant that his single rifle was to oppose the march of the German Army to Calais — René smiled also.

Mrs. Gregory rose.

"I shall report your view to the society," she said coldly. "I understand how you feel, but I fail to see the reason for this attack on me."

"I guess you see all right!" he flung at her. "She's my future wife. If you hadn't put this nonsense into her head we'd be married now and she'd be here in God's country and not living with a lot of foreigners who don't know a good woman when they see one. I want her back, that's all. But I want her back safe.

And if anything happens to her I'll make you pay — you and all your notoriety hunters."

He went out then, and was for leaving without his hat or coat, but the butler caught him at the door. Out in the spring sunlight he walked rapidly, still seething, remembering other bitter things he had meant to say, and repeating them to himself.

But he had said enough.

Mrs. Gregory's account of his visit she reported at a meeting specially called. The narrative lost nothing in the repetition. But the kindly women who sat in the church house sewing or knitting listened to what Harvey had said and looked troubled. They liked Sara Lee, and many of them had daughters of their own.

The photograph was passed around. Undoubtedly Sara Lee was living in a ruined village. Certainly ruined villages were only found very near the Front. And René unquestionably held a gun. Tales of German brutalities to women had come and were coming constantly to their ears. Mabel Andrews had written to them for supplies, and she had added to the chapter of horrors.

Briefly, the sense of the meeting was that Harvey had been brutal, but that he was right. An older woman in a safe place they might continue to support, but none of them would assume the responsibility of the crushing out of a young girl's life.

To be quite frank, possibly Harvey's appeal would have carried less weight had it not coincided with Sara

Lee's request for more money. Neither one alone would have brought about the catastrophe, but altogether they made question and answer, problem and solution. Money was scarce. Demands were heavy. None of them except Mrs. Gregory had more than just enough. And there was this additional situation to face: there was no end of the war in sight; it gave promise now of going on indefinitely.

Joffre had said, "I nibble them." But to nibble a hole in the Germany Army might take years. They had sent Sara Lee for a few months. How about keeping her there indefinitely?

Oddly enough, it was Harvey's sister Belle who made the only protest against the recall.

"Of course, I want her back," she said slowly. "You'd understand better if you had to live with Harvey. I'm sorry, Mrs. Gregory, that he spoke to you as he did, but he's nearly crazy." She eyed the assembly with her tired shrewd eyes. "I'm no talker," she went on, "but Sara Lee has done a big thing. We don't realize, I guess, how big it is. And I think we'll just about kill her if we bring her home."

"Better to do that than to have her killed over there," some one said.

And in spite of Belle's protest, that remained the sense of the meeting. It was put to the vote and decided to recall Sara Lee. She could bring a report of conditions, and if she thought it wise an older woman could go later, to a safer place.

Belle was very quiet that evening. After dinner she

went to Harvey's room and found him dressing to go out.

"I'm going with a crowd to the theater," he said. "First week of the summer stock company, you know."

He tied his tie defiantly, avoiding Belle's eyes in the mirror.

"Harvey," she said, "they're going to bring Sara Lee home."

He said nothing, but his hands shook somewhat.

"And I think," Belle said, "that you will be sorry for what you have done — all the rest of your life."

XXI

BY the time Henri was well enough to resume his former activities it was almost the first of May. The winter quiet was over with a vengeance, and the Allies were hammering hard with their first tolerably full supply of high-explosive shells.

Cheering reports came daily to the little house — of rapidly augmenting armies, of big guns on caterpillar trucks that were moving slowly up to the Allied Front. Great Britain had at last learned her lesson, that only shells of immense destructiveness were of any avail against the German batteries. She was moving heaven and earth to get them, but the supply was still inadequate. With the new shells experiments were being made in barrage fire — costly experiments now and then; but the Allies were apt in learning the ugly game of modern war.

Only on the Belgian Front was there small change. The shattered army was being freshly outfitted. England was sending money and ammunition, and on the sand dunes small bodies of fresh troops drilled and smiled grimly and drilled again. But there were not, as in England and in France, great bodies of young men to draw from. Too many had been caught beyond the German wall of steel.

Yet a wave of renewed courage had come with the

sun and the green fields. And conditions had improved for the Belgians in other ways. They were being paid, for one thing, with something like regularity. Food was better and more plentiful. One day Henri appeared at the top of the street and drove down triumphantly a small unclipped horse, which trundled behind it a vertical boiler on wheels with fire box and stovepipe.

"A portable kitchen!" he explained. "See, here for soup and here for coffee. And more are coming."

"Very soon, Henri, they will not need me," Sara Lee said wistfully.

But he protested almost violently. He even put the question to the horse, and blowing in his ear made him shake his head in the negative.

She was needed, indeed. To the great base hospital at La Panne went more and more wounded men. But to the little house of mercy came the small odds and ends in increasing numbers. Medical men were scarce, and badly overworked. There was talk, for a time, of sending a surgeon to the little house, but it came to nothing. La Panne was not far away, and all the surgeons they could get there were not too many.

So the little house went on much as before. Henri had moved to the mill. He was at work again, and one day, in the King's villa and quietly, because of many reasons, Henri, a very white and erect Henri, received a second medal, the highest for courage that could be given.

He did not tell Sara Lee.

But though he and the men who served under him worked hard, they could not always perform miracles. The German planes still outnumbered the Allied ones. They had grown more daring with the spring, too, and whatever Henri might learn of ground operations, he could not foretell those of the air.

On a moonlight night in early May Sara Lee, setting out her dressings, heard a man running up the street. René challenged him sharply, only to step aside. It was Henri. He burst in on Sara Lee.

"To the cellar, mademoiselle!" he said.

"A bombardment?" asked Sara Lee.

"From the air. They may pass over, but there are twelve *taubes,* and they are circling overhead."

The first bomb dropped then in the street. It was white moonlight and the Germans must have seen that there were no troops. Probably it was as Henri said later, that they had learned of the little house, and since it brought such aid and comfort as might be it was to be destroyed.

The house of the mill went with the second bomb. Then followed a deafening uproar as plane after plane dropped its shells on the dead town. Marie and Sara Lee were in the cellar by that time, but the cellar was scarcely safer than the floor above. From a bombardment by shells from guns miles away there was protection. From a bomb dropped from the sky, the floors above were practically useless.

Only Henri and René remained on the street floor. Henri was extinguishing lights. In the passage René

stood, not willing to take refuge until Henri, whom he adored, had done so. For a moment the uproar ceased, and in a spirit of bravado René stepped out into the moonlight and made a gesture of derision into the air.

He fell there, struck by a piece of splintered shell.

"Come, René!" Henri called. "The brave are those who live to fight again, not ——"

But René's figure against the moonlight was gone Henri ran to the doorway then and found him lying, his head on the little step where he had been wont to sit and whittle and sing his Tipperaree. He was dead. Henri carried him in and laid him in the little passage, very reverently. Then he went below.

"Where is René?" Sara Lee asked from the darkness.

"A foolish boy," said Henri, a catch in his throat. "He is, I think, watching these fiends of the air, from some shelter."

"There is no shelter," shivered the girl.

He groped for her hand in the darkness, and so they stood, hand in hand, like two children, waiting for what might come.

It was not until the thing was over that he told her. He had gone up first and so that she would not happen on his silent figure unwarned, had carried René to the open upper floor, where he lay, singularly peaceful, face up to the awful beauty of the night.

"Good night, little brother," Henri said to him, and left him there with a heavy heart. Never again would

René sit and whittle on the doorstep and sing his tuneless Tipperaree. Never again would he gaze with boyish adoring eyes at Sara Lee as she moved back and forth in the little house.

Henri stared up at the sky. The moon looked down, cold and cruelly bright, on the vanishing squadron of death, on the destroyed town and on the boy's white face. Somewhere, Henri felt, vanishing like the German *taubes,* but to peace instead of war, was moving René's brave and smiling spirit — a boyish angel, eager and dauntless, and still looking up.

Henri took off his cap and crossed himself.

Another sentry took René's place the next day, but the little house had lost something it could not regain. And a greater loss was to come.

Jean brought out the mail that day. For Sara Lee, moving about silent and red-eyed, there was a letter from Mr. Travers. He inclosed a hundred pounds and a clipping from a London newspaper entitled The Little House of Mercy.

"Evidently," he wrote, "you were right and we were wrong. One-half of the inclosed check is from my wife, who takes this method of showing her affectionate gratitude. The balance is from myself. Once, some months ago, I said to you that almost you restored my faith in human nature. To-day I may say that, in these hours of sorrow for us all, what you have done and are doing has brought into my gray day a breath of hope."

There was another clipping, but no comment. It

recorded the death of a Reginald Alexander Travers, aged thirty.

It was then that Sara Lee, who was by way of thinking for herself those days, and of thinking clearly, recognized the strange new self-abnegation of the English — their attitude not so much of suppressing their private griefs as of refusing to obtrude them. A strongly individualistic people, they were already commencing to think nationally. Grief was a private matter, to be borne privately. To the world they must present an unbroken front, an unshaken and unshakable faith. A new attitude, and a strange one, for grumbling, crochety, gouty-souled England.

A people who had for centuries insisted not only on its rights but on its privileges was now giving as freely as ever it had demanded. It was as though, having hoarded all those years, it had but been hoarding against the day of payment. As it had received it gave — in money, in effort, in life. And without pretext.

So the Traverses, having given up all that had made life for them, sent a clipping only, and no comment. Sara Lee, through a mist of tears, saw them alone in their drawing-room, having tea as usual, and valiantly speaking of small things, and bravely facing the future, but never, in the bitterest moments, making complaint or protest.

Would America, she wondered, if her hour came, be so brave? Harvey had a phrase for such things. It was "stand the gaff." Would America stand the gaff so well? Courage was America's watchword, but a

courage of the body rather than of the soul — physical courage, not moral. What would happen if America entered the struggle and the papers were filled, as were the British and the French, with long casualty lists, each name a knife thrust somewhere?

She wondered.

And then, before long, it was Sara Lee's turn to stand the gaff. There was another letter, a curiously incoherent one from Harvey's sister. She referred to something that the society had done, and hoped that Sara Lee would take it in kindness, as it was meant. Harvey was well and much happier. She was to try to understand Harvey's part. He had been almost desperate. Evidently the letter had preceded one that should have arrived at the same time. Sara Lee was sadly puzzled. She went to Henri with it, but he could make nothing out of it. There was nothing to do but to wait.

The next night Henri was to go through the lines again. Since his wounding he had been working on the Allied side, and fewer lights there were in his district that flashed the treacherous message across the flood, between night and morning. But now it was imperative that he go through the German lines again. It was feared that with grappling hooks the enemy was slowly and cautiously withdrawing the barbed wire from the inundated fields; and that could mean but one thing.

On the night he was to go Henri called Sara Lee

from the crowded *salle à manger* and drawing her into the room across closed the door.

"Mademoiselle," he said gravely, "once before, long ago, you permitted me to kiss you. Will you do that for me again?'

She kissed him at once gravely. Once she would have flushed. She did not now. For there was a change in Sara Lee as well as in her outlook. She had been seeing for months the shortness of life, the brief tenure men held on it, the value of such happiness as might be for the hours that remained. She was a woman now, for all her slim young body and her charm of youth. Values had changed. To love, and to show that love, to cheer, to comfort and help — that was necessary, because soon the chance might be gone, and there would be long aching years of regret.

So she kissed him gravely and looked up into his eyes, her own full of tears.

"God bless and keep you, dear Henri," she said.

Then she went back to her work.

XXII

MUCH of Sara Lee's life at home had faded. She seemed to be two people. One was the girl who had knitted the afghan for Anna, and had hidden it away from Uncle James' kind but curious eyes. And one was this present Sara Lee, living on the edge of eternity, and seeing men die or suffer horribly, not to gain anything — except perhaps some honorable advancement for their souls — but that there might be preserved, at any cost, the right of honest folk to labor in their fields, to love, to pray, and at last to sleep in the peace of God.

She had lost the past and she dared not look into the future. So she was living each day as it came, with its labor, its love, its prayers and at last its sleep. Even Harvey seemed remote and stern and bitter. She reread his letters often, but they were forced. And after a time she realized another quality in them. They were self-centered. It was *his* anxiety, *his* loneliness, *his* humiliation. Sara Lee's eyes were looking out, those days, over a suffering world. Harvey's eyes were turned in on himself.

She realized this, but she never formulated it, even to herself. What she did acknowledge was a growing fear of the reunion which must come sometime — that

he was cherishing still further bitterness against that day, that he would say things that he would regret later. Sometimes the thought of that day came to her when she was doing a dressing, and her hands would tremble.

Henri had not returned when, the second day after René's death, the letter came which recalled her. She opened it eagerly. Though from Harvey there usually came at the best veiled reproach, the society had always sent its enthusiastic approval.

She read it twice before she understood, and it was only when she read Belle's letter again that she began to comprehend. She was recalled; and the recall was Harvey's work.

She was very close to hating him that day. He had never understood. She would go back to him, as she had promised; but always, all the rest of their lives, there would be this barrier between them. To the barrier of his bitterness would be added her own resentment. She could never even talk to him of her work, of those great days when in her small way she had felt herself a part of the machinery of mercy of the war.

Harvey had lost something out of Sara Lee's love for him. He had done it himself, madly, despairingly. She still loved him, she felt. Nothing could change that or her promise to him. But with that love there was something now of fear. And she felt, too, that after all the years she had known him she had not known him at all. The Harvey she had known was a

tender and considerate man, soft-spoken. slow to wrath, always gentle. But the Harvey of his letters and of the recall was a stranger.

It was the result of her upbringing, probably, that she had no thought of revolt. Her tie to Harvey was a real tie. By her promise to him her life was no longer hers to order. It belonged to some one else, to be ordered for her. But, though she accepted, she was too clear a thinker not to resent.

When Henri returned, toward dawn of the following night, he did not come alone. Sara Lee, rising early, found two men in her kitchen — one of them Henri, who was making coffee, and a soldier in a gray-green uniform, with a bad bruise over one eye and a sulky face. His hands were tied, but otherwise he sat at ease, and Henri, having made the coffee, held a cup to his lips.

"It is good for the spirits, man," he said in German. "Drink it."

The German took it, first gingerly, then eagerly. Henri was in high good humor.

"See, I have brought you a gift!" he exclaimed on seeing Sara Lee. "What shall we do with him? Send him to America? To show the appearance of the madmen of Europe?"

The prisoner was only a boy, such a boy as Henri himself; but a peasant, and muscular. Beside his bulk Henri looked slim as a reed. Henri eyed him with a certain tolerant humor.

"He is young, and a Bavarian," he said. "Other-

wise I should have killed him, for he fought hard. He has but just been called."

There was another conference in the little house that morning, but Henri's prisoner could tell little. He had heard nothing of an advance. Further along the line it was said that there was much fighting. He sat there, pale and bewildered and very civil, and in the end his frightened politeness brought about a change in the attitude of the men who questioned him. Hate all Germans as they must, who had suffered so grossly, this boy was not of those who had outraged them.

They sent him on at last, and Sara Lee was free to tell Henri her news. But she had grown very wise as to Henri's moods, and she hesitated. A certain dissatisfaction had been growing in the boy for some time, a sense of hopelessness. Further along the spring had brought renewed activity to the Allied armies. Great movements were taking place.

But his own men stood in their trenches, or what passed for trenches, or lay on their hours of relief in such wretched quarters as could be found, still with no prospect of action. No great guns, drawn by heavy tractors, came down the roads toward the trenches by the sea. Steady bombarding, incessant sniping and no movement on either side — that was the Belgian Front during the first year of the war. Inaction, with that eating anxiety as to what was going on in the occupied territory, was the portion of the heroic small army that stretched from Nieuport to Dixmude.

And Henri's nerves were not good. He was un-

happy — that always — and he was not yet quite recovered from his wounds. There was on his mind, too, a certain gun which moved on a railway track, back and forth, behind the German lines, doing the work of many. He had tried to get to that gun, and failed. And he hated failure.

Certainly in this story of Sara Lee and of Henri, whose other name must not be known, allowance must be made for all those things. Yet — perhaps no allowance is enough.

Sara Lee told him that evening of her recall, told him when the shuffling of many feet in the street told of the first weary men from the trenches coming up the road.

He heard her in a dazed silence. Then:

"But you will not go?" he said. "It is impossible! You — you are needed, mademoiselle."

"What can I do, Henri? They have recalled me. My money will not come now."

"Perhaps we can arrange that. It does not cost so much. I have friends — and think, mademoiselle, how many know now of what you are doing, and love you for it. Some of them would contribute, surely."

He was desperately revolving expedients in his mind. He could himself do no more than he had done. He, or rather Jean and he together, had been bearing a full half of the expense of the little house since the beginning. But he dared not tell her that. And though he spoke hopefully, he knew well that he could

raise nothing from the Belgians he knew best. Henri came of a class that held its fortunes in land, and that land was now in German hands.

"We will arrange it somehow," he said with forced cheerfulness. "No beautiful thing — and this is surely beautiful — must die because of money."

It was then that Sara Lee took the plunge.

"It is not only money, Henri."

"He has sent for you!"

Harvey was always "he" to Henri.

"Not exactly. But I think he went to some one and said I should not be here alone. You can understand how he feels. We were going to be married very soon, and then I decided to come. It made an awful upset."

Henri stood with folded arms and listened. At first he said nothing. When he spoke it was in a voice of ominous calm:

"So for a stupid convention he would destroy this beautiful thing you have made! Does he know your work? Does he know what you are to the men here? Have you ever told him?"

"I have, of course, but ——"

"Do you want to go back?"

"No, Henri. Not yet. I ——"

"That is enough. You are needed. You are willing to stay. I shall attend to the money. It is arranged."

"You don't understand," said Sara Lee desperately. "I am engaged to him. I can't wreck his life, can I?"

"Would it wreck your life?" he demanded. "Tell me that and I shall know how to reason with you."

But she only looked at him helplessly.

Heavy tramping in the passage told of the arrival of the first men. They did not talk and laugh as usual. As well as they could they came quietly. For René had been a good friend to many of them, and had admitted on slack nights many a weary man who had no ticket. Much as the neighbors had entered the house back home after Uncle James had gone away, came these bearded men that night. And Sara Lee, hearing their muffled voices, brushed a hand over her eyes and tried to smile.

"We can talk about it later," she said. "We mustn't quarrel. I owe so much to you, Henri."

Suddenly Henri caught her by the arm and turned her about so that she faced the lamp.

"Do you love him?" he demanded. "Sara Lee, look at me!" Only he pronounced it Saralie. "He has done a very cruel thing. Do you still love him?"

Sara Lee shut her eyes.

"I don't know. I think I do. He is very unhappy, and it is my fault."

"Your fault!"

"I must go, Henri. The men are waiting."

But he still held her arm.

"Does he love you as I love you?" he demanded. "Would he die for you?"

"That's rather silly, isn't it? Men don't die for the people they love."

"I would die for you, Saralie."

She eyed him rather helplessly.

"I don't think you mean that." Bad strategy that, for he drew her to him. His arms were like steel, and it was a rebellious and very rigid Sara Lee who found she could not free herself.

"I would die for you, Saralie!" he repeated fiercely. "That would be easier, far, than living without you. There is nothing that matters but you. Listen — I would put everything I have — my honor, my life, my hope of eternity — on one side of the scale and you on the other. And I would choose you. Is that love?" He freed her.

"It's insanity," said Sara Lee angrily. "You don't mean it. And I don't want that kind of love, if that is what you call it."

"And you will go back to that man who loves himself better than he loves you?"

"That's not true!" she flashed at him. "He is sending for me, not to get me back to him, but to get me back to safety."

"What sort of safety?" Henri demanded in an ominous tone. "Is he afraid of me?"

"He doesn't know anything about you."

"You have never told him? Why?" His eyes narrowed.

"He wouldn't have understood, Henri."

"You are going back to him," he said slowly; "and you will always keep these days of ours buried in your heart. Is that it?" His eyes softened. "I am to

be a memory! Do you know what I think? I think you care for me more than you know. We have lived a lifetime together in these months. You know me better than you know him, already. We have faced death together. That is a strong tie. And I have held you in my arms. Do you think you can forget that?"

"I shall never want to forget you."

"I shall not let you forget me. You may go — I cannot prevent that perhaps. But wherever I am, Saralie, I shall stand between that lover of yours and you. And sometime I shall come from this other side of the world, and I shall find you, and you will come back with me. Back to this country — our country."

They were boyish words, but back of them was the iron determination of a man. His eyes seemed sunken in his head. His face was white. But there was almost a prophetic ring in his voice.

Sara Lee went out and left him there, went out rather terrified and bewildered, and refusing absolutely to look into her own heart.

XXIII

LATE in May she started for home. It had not been necessary to close the little house. An Englishwoman of mature years and considerable wealth, hearing from Mr. Travers of Sara Lee's recall, went out a day or two before she left and took charge. She was a kindly woman, in deep mourning; and some of the ache left Sara Lee's heart when she had talked with her successor.

Perhaps, too, Mrs. Cameron understood some of the things that had puzzled her before. She had been a trifle skeptical perhaps about Sara Lee before she saw her. A young girl alone among an army of men! She was a good woman herself, and not given to harsh judgments, but the thing had seemed odd. But Sara Lee in her little house, as virginal, as without sex-consciousness as a child, Sara Lee with her shabby clothes and her stained hands and her honest eyes — this was not only a good girl, this was a brave and high-spirited and idealistic woman.

And after an evening in the house of mercy, with the soldiers openly adoring and entirely respectful, Mrs. Cameron put her arms round Sara Lee and kissed her.

"You must let me thank you," she said. "You have made me feel what I have not felt since ——"

She stopped. Her mourning was only a month old. "I see to-night that, after all, many things may be gone, but that while service remains there is something worth while in life."

The next day she asked Sara Lee to stay with her, at least through the summer. Sara Lee hesitated, but at last she agreed to cable. As Henri had disappeared with the arrival of Mrs. Cameron it was that lady's chauffeur who took the message to Dunkirk and sent it off.

She had sent the cable to Harvey. It was no longer a matter of the Ladies' Aid. It was between Harvey and herself.

The reply came on the second day. It was curt and decisive.

"Now or never," was the message Harvey sent out of his black despair, across the Atlantic to the little house so close under the guns of Belgium.

Henri was half mad those last days. Jean tried to counsel him, but he was irritable, almost savage. And Jean understood. The girl had grown deep into his own heart. Like Henri, he believed that she was going back to unhappiness; he even said so to her in the car, on that last sad day when Sara Lee, having visited René's grave and prayed in the ruined church, said good-by to the little house, and went away, tearless at the last, because she was too sad for tears.

It was not for some time that Jean spoke what was in his mind, and when he had done so she turned to him gravely:

"You are wrong, Jean. He is the kindest of men. Once I am back, and safe, he will be very different. I'm afraid I've given you a wrong impression of him."

"You think then, mademoiselle, that he will forget all these months — he will never be unhappy over them?"

"Why should he?" said Sara Lee proudly. "When I tell him everything he will understand. And he will be very proud that I have done my share."

But Jean's one eye was dubious.

At the wharf in Dunkirk they found Henri, a pale but composed Henri. Jean's brows contracted. He had thought that the boy would follow his advice and stay away. But Henri was there.

It was as well, perhaps, for Sara Lee had brought him a letter, one of those missives from the trenches which had been so often left at the little house.

Henri thrust it into his pocket without reading it.

"Everything is prepared," he said. "It is the British Admiralty boat, and one of the officers has offered his cabin. You will be quite comfortable."

He appeared entirely calm. He saw to carrying Sara Lee's small bag on board; he chatted with the officers; he even wandered over to a hospital ship moored near by and exchanged civilities with a wounded man in a chair on the deck. Perhaps he swaggered a bit too much, for Jean watched him with some anxiety. He saw that the boy was taking it hard. His eyes were very sunken now, and he moved

his right arm stiffly, as though the old wound troubled him.

Jean did not like leave-takings. Particularly he did not like taking leave of Sara Lee. Some time before the boat sailed he kissed her hand, and then patted it and went away in the car without looking back.

The boat was preparing to get under way. Henri was standing by her very quietly. He had not slept the night before, but then there were many nights when Henri did not sleep. He had wandered about, smoking incessantly, trying to picture the black future.

He could see no hope anywhere. America was far away, and peaceful. Very soon the tranquillity of it all would make the last months seem dreamlike and unreal. She would forget Belgium, forget him. Or she would remember him as a soldier who had once loved her. Once loved her, because she had never seemed to realize the lasting quality of his love. She had always felt that he would forget her. If he could only make her believe that he would not, it would not be so hopeless.

He had written a bit of a love letter on the little table at Dunkirk that morning, written it with the hope that the sight of the written words might carry conviction where all his protests had failed.

"I shall love you all the years of my life," he wrote. 'At any time, in any place, you may come to me and know that I am waiting. Great love like this comes only once to any man, and once come to him it never goes away. At any time in the years to come you may

know with certainty that you are still to me what you are now, the love of my life.

"Sometimes I think, dearest — I may call you that once, now that you have left me — that far away you will hear this call of mine and come back to me. Perhaps you will never come. Perhaps I shall not live. I feel to-day that I do not care greatly to live.

"If that is to be, then think of me somewhere, perhaps with René by my side, since he, too, loved you And I shall still be calling you, and waiting. Perhaps even beyond the stars they have need of a little house of mercy; and, God knows, wherever I am I shall have need of you."

He had the letter in the pocket of his tunic, and at last the moment came when the boat must leave. Suddenly Henri knew that he could not allow her to cross to England alone. The last few days had brought many stories of submarine attacks. Here, so far north, the Germans were particularly active. They had for a long time lurked in waiting for this British Admiralty boat, with its valuable cargo, its officers and the government officials who used it.

"Good-by, Henri," said Sara Lee. "I — of course it is no use to try to tell you ——"

"I am going across with you."

"But ——"

"I allowed you to come over alone. I shiver when I think of it. I shall take you back myself."

"Is it very dangerous?"

"Probably not. But can you think of me standing

safe on that quay and letting you go into danger alone?"

"I am not afraid."

"I know that. I have never seen you afraid. But if you wish to see a coward, look at me. I am a coward for you."

He put his hand into his pocket. It occurred to him to give her the letter now so that if anything happened she would at least have had it. He wanted no mistake about that appointment beyond the stars. But the great world of eternity was very large, and they must have a definite understanding about that meeting at the little house of mercy Over There.

Perhaps he had a little fever that day. He was alternately flushed and pale; and certainly he was not quite rational. His hand shook as he brought out her letter — and with it the other letter, from the Front.

"Have you the time to come with me?" Sara Lee asked doubtfully. "I want you to come, of course, but if your work will suffer ——"

He held out his letter to her.

"I shall go away," he said, "while you read it. And perhaps you will not destroy it, because — I should like to feel that you have it always."

He went away at once, saluting as he passed other officers, who gravely saluted him. On the deck of the hospital ship the invalid touched his cap. Word was going about, in the stealthy manner of such things, that Henri, whose family name we may not know, was a brave man and doing brave things.

The steamer had not yet cast off. As usual, it was to take a flying start from the harbor, for it was just outside the harbor that the wolves of the sea lay in wait. Henri, alone at last, opened his letter, and stood staring at it. There was again movement behind the German line, a matter to be looked into, as only he could do it. Probably nothing, as before; but who could say?

Henri looked along the shore to where but a few miles away lay the ragged remnant of his country. And he looked forward to where Sara Lee, his letter in her hand, was staring blindly at nothing. Then he looked out toward the sea, where lay who knew what dangers of death and suffering.

After that first moment of indecision he never hesitated. He stood on the deck and watched, rather frozen and rigid, and with a mind that had ceased working, while the steamer warped out from the quay. If in his subconsciousness there was any thought it was doubtless that he had done his best for a long time, and that he had earned the right to protect for a few hours the girl he loved. That, too, there had been activity along the German-Belgian line before, without result.

Perhaps subconsciously those things were there. He himself was conscious of no thought, of only a dogged determination to get Sara Lee across the channel safely. He put everything else behind him. He counted no cost.

The little admiralty boat sped on. In the bow, on

the bridge, and at different stations lookouts kept watch. The lifeboats were hung overboard, ready to lower instantly. On the horizon a British destroyer steamed leisurely. Henri stood for a long time on the deck. The land fell away quickly. From a clear silhouette of the town against the sky — the dunes, the spire of the cathedral, the roof of the *mairie* — it became vague, shadowy — the height of a hand — a line — nothing.

Henri roused himself. He was very thirsty, and the wound in his arm ached. When he raised his hand to salute the movement was painful.

It was a very grave Sara Lee he found in the officer's cabin when he went inside later on. She was sitting on the long seat below the open port, her hat slightly askew and her hands folded in her lap. Her bag was beside her, and there was in her eyes a perplexity Henri was too wretched to notice.

For the first time Sara Lee was realizing the full value of the thing she was throwing away. She had persistently discounted it until now. She had been grateful for it. She had felt unworthy of it. But now, on the edge of leaving it, she felt that something infinitely precious and very beautiful was going out of her life. She had already a sense of loss.

For the first time, too, she was allowing herself to think of certain contingencies that were now forever impossible. For instance, suppose she had stayed with Mrs. Cameron? Suppose she had broken her promise to Harvey and remained at the little house?

Suppose she had done as Henri had so wildly urged her, and had broken entirely with Harvey? Would she have married Henri?

There was a certain element of caution in the girl. It made the chances she had taken rather more courageous, indeed, because she had always counted the cost. But marriage was not a matter for taking chances. One should know not only the man, but his setting, though she would not have thought of it in that way. Not only the man, but the things that made up his life — his people, his home.

And Henri was to her still a figure, not so much now of mystery as of detachment. Except Jean he had no intimates. He had no family on the only side of the line she knew. He had not even a country.

She had reached that point when Henri came below and saluted her stiffly from the doorway.

"Henri!" she said. "I believe you are ill!"

"I am not ill," he said, and threw himself into the corner of the seat. "You have read it?"

She nodded. Even thinking of it brought a lump into her throat. He bent forward, but he did not touch her.

"I meant it, Saralie," he said. "Sometimes men are infatuated, and write what they do not mean. They are sincere at the time, and then later on —— But I meant it. I shall always mean it."

Not then, nor during the three days in London, did he so much as take her hand. He was not well. He ate nothing, and at night he lay awake and drank a

great deal of water. Once or twice he found her looking at him anxiously, but he disclaimed all illness.

He had known from the beginning what he was doing. But he did not touch her, because in his heart he knew that where once he had been worthy he was no longer worthy. He had left his work for a woman.

It is true that he had expected to go back at once. But the *Philadelphia*, which had been listed to sail the next day, was held up by a strike in Liverpool, and he waited on, taking such hours as she could give him, feverishly anxious to make her happy, buying her little gifts — mostly flowers, which she wore tucked in her belt and smiled over, because she had never before received flowers from a man.

He was alternately gay and silent. They walked across the Thames by the Parliament buildings, and midway across he stopped and looked long at the stream. And they went to the Zoölogical Gardens, where he gravely named one of the sea lions for Colonel Lilias because of its mustache, and insisted on saluting it each time before he flung it a fish. Once he soberly gathered up a very new baby camel, all legs, in his arms, and presented it to her.

"Please accept it, mademoiselle," he said. "With my compliments."

They dined together every night, very modestly, sitting in some crowded restaurant perhaps, but seeing little but each other. Sara Lee had bought a new hat in London — black, of course, but faced with white. He adored her in it. He would sit for long moments.

his elbows propped on the table, his blond hair gleaming in the candlelight, and watch her.

"I wonder," he said once, "if you had never met him would you have loved me?"

"I do love you, Henri."

"I don't want that sort of love." And he had turned his head away.

But one evening he called for her at Morley's, a white and crushed boy, needing all that she could give him and much more. He came as a man goes to the woman he loves when he is in trouble, much as a child to his mother. Sara Lee, coming down to the reception room, found him alone there, walking rapidly up and down. He turned desperate eyes on her.

"I have brought bad news," he said abruptly.

"The little house ——"

"I do not know. I ran away, mademoiselle. I am a traitor. And the Germans broke through last night."

"Henri!"

"They broke through. We were not ready. That is what I have done."

"Don't you think," Sara Lee said in a frozen voice, "that is what I have done? I let you come."

"You? You are taking the blame? Mademoiselle, I have enough to bear without that."

He explained further, still standing in his rigid attitude. If he had been white before at times he was ghastly now. It had not been an attack in force. A small number had got across and had penetrated be-

yond the railway line. There had been hand-to-hand fighting in the road beyond the poplars. But it looked more like an experiment, an endeavor to discover the possibility of a real advance through the inundation; or perhaps a feint to cover operations elsewhere.

"For every life lost I am responsible," he ended in a flat and lifeless tone.

"But you might not have known," she protested wildly. "Even if you had been there, Henri, you might not have known." She knew something of war by that time. "How could you have told that a small movement of troops was to take place?"

"I should have been there."

"But — if they came without warning?"

"I did not tell you," he said, looking away from her. "There had been a warning. I disregarded it."

He went back to Belgium that night. Sara Lee, at the last, held out her hand. She was terrified for him, and she showed it.

"I shall not touch your hand," he said. "I have forfeited my right to do that." Then, seeing what was in her face, he reassured her. "I shall not do *that*," he said. "It would be easier. But I shall have to go back and see what can be done."

He was the old Henri to the last, however. He went carefully over her steamship ticket, and inquired with equal care into the amount of money she had.

"It will take you home?" he asked.

"Very comfortably, Henri."

"It seems very little."

Then he said, apropos of nothing: "Poor Jean!"

When he left her at last he went to the door, very erect and soldierly. But he turned there and stood for a moment looking at her, as though through all that was coming he must have with him, to give him strength, that final picture of her.

The elderly chambermaid, coming into Sara Lee's room the next morning, found her fully dressed in the frock she had worn the night before, face down on her bed.

XXIV

IT was early in June when at last the lights went down behind the back drop and came up in front, to show Sara Lee knitting again, though not by the fire. The amazing interlude was over.

Over, except in Sara Lee's heart. The voyage had been a nightmare. She had been ill for one thing — a combination of seasickness and heartsickness. She had allowed Henri to come to England with her, and the Germans had broken through. All the good she had done — and she had helped — was nothing to this mischief she had wrought.

It had been a small raid. She gathered that from the papers on board. But that was not the vital thing. What mattered was that she had let a man forget his duty to his country in his solicitude for her.

But as the days went on the excitement of her return dulled the edge of her misery somewhat. The thing was done. She could do only one thing to help. She would never go back, never again bring trouble and suffering where she had meant only to bring aid and comfort.

She had a faint hope that Harvey would meet her at the pier. She needed comforting and soothing, and perhaps a bit of praise. She was so very tired; depressed, too, if the truth be known. She needed a

hand to lead her back to her old place on the stage, and kind faces to make her forget that she had ever gone away.

Because that was what she had to do. She must forget Henri and the little house on the road to the poplar trees; and most of all, she must forget that because of her Henri had let the Germans through.

But Harvey did not meet her. There was a telegram saying he would meet her train if she wired when she was leaving — an exultant message breathing forgiveness and signed "with much love." She flushed when she read it.

Of course he could not meet her in New York. This was not the Continent in wartime, where convention had died of a great necessity. And he was not angry, after all. A great wave of relief swept over her. But it was odd how helpless she felt. Since her arrival in England months before there had always been Henri to look after things for her. It was incredible to recall how little she had done for herself.

Was she glad to be back? She did not ask herself. It was as though the voyage had automatically detached her from that other Sara Lee of the little house. That was behind her, a dream — a mirage — or a memory. Here, a trifle confused by the bustle, was once again the Sara Lee who had knitted for Anna, and tended the plants in the dining-room window, and watched Uncle James slowly lowered into his quiet grave.

Part of her detachment was voluntary. She could

not bear to remember. She had but to close her eyes to see Henri's tragic face that last night at Morley's. And part of the detachment was because, after all, the interlude had been but a matter of months, and reaching out familiar hands to her were the habits and customs and surroundings of all the earlier years of her life, drawing her back to them.

It was strange how Henri's face haunted her. She could close her eyes and see it, line by line, his very swagger — for he did swagger, just a little; his tall figure and unruly hair; his long, narrow, muscular hands. Strange and rather uncomfortable. Because she could not summon Harvey's image at all. She tried to bring before her, that night in the train speeding west, his solid figure and kind eyes as they would greet her the next day — tried, and failed. All she got was the profile of the photograph, and the stubborn angle of the jaw.

She was up very early the next morning, and it was then, as the train rolled through familiar country, that she began to find Harvey again. A flush of tenderness warmed her. She must be very kind to him because of all that he had suffered.

The train came to a stop. Rather breathless Sara Lee went out on the platform. Harvey was there, in the crowd. He did not see her at first. He was looking toward the front of the train. So her first glimpse of him was the view of the photograph. His hat was off, and his hair, carefully brushed back, gave him the eager look of the picture.

He was a strong and manly figure, as unlike Henri as an oak is unlike one of Henri's own tall and swaying poplars. Sara Lee drew a long breath. Here after all were rest and peace; love and gentleness; quiet days and still evenings. No more crowds and wounds and weary men, no more great thunderings of guns, no imminence of death. Rest and peace.

Then Harvey saw her, and the gleam of happiness and relief in his eyes made her own eyes misty. She saw even in that first glance that he looked thinner and older. A pang of remorse shot through her. Was happiness always bought at the cost of happiness? Did one always take away in order to give? Not in so many words, but in a flash of doubt the thought went through her mind.

There was no reserve in Harvey's embrace. He put his arms about her and held her close. He did not speak at first. Then:

"My own little girl," he said. "My own little girl!"

Suddenly Sara Lee was very happy. All her doubts were swept away by his voice, his arms. There was no thrill for her in his caress, but there were peace and quiet joy. It was enough for her, just then, that she had brought back some of the happiness she had robbed him of.

"Oh, Harvey!" she said. "I'm glad to be back again — with you."

He held her off then and looked at her.

"You are thin," he said. "You're not pale, but

you are thin." And in a harder voice: "What did they do to you over there?"

But he did not wait for a reply. He did not seem to want one. He picked up her bag, and guiding her by the elbow, piloted her through the crowd.

"A lot of folks wanted to come and meet you," he said, "but I steered them off. You'd have thought Roosevelt was coming to town the way they've been calling up."

"To meet me?"

"I expect the Ladies' Aid Society wanted to get into the papers again," he said rather grimly. "They are merry little advertisers, all right."

"I don't think that, Harvey."

"Well, I do," he said, and brought her to a stop facing a smart little car, very new, very gay.

"How do you like it?" he asked.

"Like it? Why, it's not yours, is it?"

"Surest thing you know. Or, rather, it's ours. Had a few war babies, and they grew up."

Sara Lee looked at it, and for just an instant, a rather sickening instant, she saw Henri's shattered low car, battle-scarred and broken.

"It's — lovely," said Sara Lee. And Harvey found no fault with her tone.

Sara Lee had intended to go to Anna's, for a time at least. But she found that Belle was expecting her and would not take no.

"She's moved the baby in with the others," Harvey explained as he took the wheel. "Wait until you see

your room. I knew we'd be buying furniture soon, so I fixed it up."

He said nothing for a time. He was new to driving a car, and the traffic engrossed him. But when they had reached a quieter neighborhood he put a hand over hers.

"Good God, how I've been hungry for you!" he said. "I guess I was pretty nearly crazy sometimes." He glanced at her apprehensively, but if she knew his connection with her recall she showed no resentment. As a matter of fact there was in his voice something that reminded her of Henri, the same deeper note, almost husky.

She was, indeed, asking herself very earnestly what was there in her of all people that should make two men care for her as both Henri and Harvey cared. In the humility of all modest women she was bewildered. It made her rather silent and a little sad. She was so far from being what they thought her.

Harvey, stealing a moment from the car to glance at her, saw something baffling in her face.

"Do you still care, Sara Lee?" he asked almost diffidently. "As much as ever?"

"I have come back to you," she said after an imperceptible pause.

"Well, I guess that's the answer."

He drew a deep satisfied breath. "I used to think of you over there, and all those foreigners in uniform strutting about, and it almost got me, sometimes."

And again, as long before, he read into her passivity his own passion, and was deeply content.

Belle was waiting on the small front porch. There was an anxious frown on her face, and she looked first, not at Sara Lee, but at Harvey. What she saw there evidently satisfied her, for the frown disappeared. She kissed Sara Lee impulsively.

All that afternoon, much to Harvey's resentment, Sara Lee received callers. The Ladies' Aid came en masse and went out to the dining-room and there had tea and cake. Harvey disappeared when they came.

"You are back," he said, "and safe, and all that. But it's not their fault. And I'll be hanged if I'll stand round and listen to them."

He got his hat and then, finding her alone in a back hall for a moment, reverted uneasily to the subject.

"There are two sides to every story," he said. "They're going to knife me this afternoon, all right. Damned hypocrites! You just keep your head, and I'll tell you my side of it later."

"Harvey," she said slowly, "I want to know now just what you did. I'm not angry. I've never been angry. But I ought to know."

It was a very one-sided story that Harvey told her, standing in the little back hall, with Belle's children hanging over the staircase and begging for cake. Yet in the main it was true. He had reached his limit of endurance. She was in danger, as the photograph plainly showed. And a fellow had a right to fight for his own happiness.

"I wanted you back, that's all," he ended. And added an anticlimax by passing a plate of sliced jelly roll through the stair rail to the clamoring children.

Sara Lee stood there for a moment after he had gone. He was right, or at least he had been within his rights. She had never even heard of the new doctrine of liberty for women. There was nothing in her training to teach her revolt. She was engaged to Harvey; already, potentially, she belonged to him. He had interfered with her life, but he had had the right to interfere.

And also there was in the back of her mind a feeling that was almost guilt. She had let Henri tell her he loved her. She had even kissed him. And there had been many times in the little house when Harvey, for days at a time, had not even entered her thoughts. There was, therefore, a very real tenderness in the face she lifted for his good-by kiss.

To Belle in the front hall Harvey gave a firm order.

"Don't let any reporters in," he said warningly. "This is strictly our affair. It's a private matter. It's nobody's business what she did over there. She's home. That's all that matters."

Belle assented, but she was uneasy. She knew that Harvey was unreasonably, madly jealous of Sara Lee's work at the little house of mercy, and she knew him well enough to know that sooner or later he would show that jealousy. She felt, too, that the girl should have been allowed her small triumph without interference. There had been interference enough already.

But it was easier to yield to Harvey than to argue with him.

It was rather a worried Belle who served tea that afternoon in her dining room, with Mrs. Gregory pouring; the more uneasy, because already she divined a change in Sara Lee. She was as lovely as ever, even lovelier. But she had a poise, a steadiness, that were new; and silences in which, to Belle's shrewd eyes, she seemed to be weighing things.

Reporters clamored to see Sara Lee that day, and, failing to see her, telephoned Harvey at his office to ask if it was true that she had been decorated by the King. He was short to the point of affront.

"I haven't heard anything about it," he snapped. "And I wouldn't say if I had. But it's not likely. What d'you fellows think she was doing anyhow? Leading a charge? She was running a soup kitchen. That's all."

He hung up the receiver with a jerk, but shortly after that he fell to pacing his small office. She had not said anything about being decorated, but the reporters had said it had been in a London newspaper. If she had not told him that, there were probably many things she had not told him. But of course there had been very little time. He would see if she mentioned it that night.

Sara Lee had had a hard day. The children loved her. In the intervals of calls they crawled over her, and the littlest one called her Saralie. She held the child in her arms close.

"Saralie!" said the child, over and over; "Saralie! That's your name. I love your name."

And there came, echoing in her ears, Henri and his tender Saralie.

There was an oppression on her too. Her very bedroom thrust on her her approaching marriage. This was her own furniture, for her new home. It was beautiful, simple and good. But she was not ready for marriage. She had been too close to the great struggle to be prepared to think in terms of peace so soon. Perhaps, had she dared to look deeper than that, she would have found something else, a something she had not counted on.

She and Belle had a little time after the visitors had gone, before Harvey came home. They sat in Belle's bedroom, and her sentences were punctuated by little backs briskly presented to have small garments fastened, or bows put on stiffly bobbed yellow hair.

"Did you understand my letter?" she asked. "I was sorry I had sent it, but it was too late then."

"I put your letter and — theirs, together. I supposed that Harvey ——"

"He was about out of his mind," Belle said in her worried voice. "Stand still, Mary Ellen! He went to Mrs. Gregory, and I suppose he said a good bit. You know the way he does. Anyhow, she was very angry. She called a special meeting, and — I tried to prevent their recalling you. He doesn't know that, of course."

"You tried?"

"Well, I felt as though it was your work," Belle said rather uncomfortably. "Bring me the comb, Alice. I guess we get pretty narrow here and — I've been following things more closely since you went over. I know more than I did. And, of course, after one marries there isn't much chance. There are children and ——" Her face twisted. "I wish I could do something."

She got up and brought from the dresser a newspaper clipping.

"It's the London newspaper," she explained. "I've been taking it, but Harvey doesn't know. He doesn't care much for the English. This is about your being decorated."

Sara Lee held it listlessly in her hands.

"Shall I tell him, Belle?" she asked.

Belle hesitated.

"I don't believe I would," she said forlornly. "He won't like it. That's why I've never showed him that clipping. He hates it all so."

Sara Lee dressed that evening in the white frock. She dressed slowly, thinking hard. All round her was the shiny newness of her furniture, a trifle crowded in Belle's small room. Sara Lee had a terrible feeling of being fastened in by it. Wherever she turned it gleamed. She felt surrounded, smothered.

She had meant to make a clean breast of things — of the little house, and of Henri, and of the King, pinning the medal on her shabby black jacket and shaking hands with her. Henri she must tell about — not his

name of course, nor his madness, nor even his love. But she felt that she owed it to Harvey to have as few secrets from him as possible. She would tell about what the boy had done for her, and how he, and he alone, had made it all possible.

Surely Harvey would understand. It was a page that was closed. It had held nothing to hurt him. She had come back.

She stood by her window, thinking. And a breath of wind set the leaves outside to rustling. Instantly she was back again in the little house, and the sound was not leaves, but the shuffling of many stealthy feet on the cobbles of the street at night, that shuffling that was so like the rustling of leaves in a wood or the murmur of water running over a stony creek bed.

XXV

IT was clear to Sara Lee from the beginning of the evening that Harvey did not intend to hear her story. He did not say so; indeed, for a time he did not talk at all. He sat with his arms round her, content just to have her there.

"I have a lot of arrears to make up," he said. "I've got to get used to having you where I can touch you. To-night when I go upstairs I'm going to take that damned colorless photograph of you and throw it out the window."

"I must tell you about your photograph," she ventured. "It always stood on the mantel over the stove, and when there was a threatened bombardment I used to put it under ——"

"Let's not talk, honey."

When he came out of that particular silence he said abruptly:

"Will Leete is dead."

"Oh, no! Poor Will Leete."

"Died of pneumonia in some God-forsaken hole over there. He's left a wife and nothing much to keep her. That's what comes of mixing in the other fellow's fight. I guess we can get the house as soon as we want it. She has to sell; and it ought to be a bargain."

"Harvey," she said rather timidly, "you speak of the other fellow's fight. They say over there that we are sure to be drawn into it sooner or later."

"Not in our life!" he replied brusquely. "And if you don't mind, honey, I don't care to hear about what they think over there." He got up from his old place on the arm of her chair and stood on the rug. "I'd better tell you now how I feel about this thing. I can't talk about it, that's all. We'll finish up now and let it go at that. I'm sorry there's a war. I'll send money when I can afford it, to help the Belgians, though my personal opinion is that they're getting theirs for what they did in the Congo. But I don't want to hear about what you did over there."

He saw her face, and he went to her and kissed her cheek.

"I don't want to hurt you, honey," he said. "I love you with all my heart. But somehow I can't forget that you left me and went over there when there was no reason for it. You put off our marriage, and I suppose we'd better get it over. Go ahead and tell me about it."

He drew up a chair and waited, but the girl smiled rather tremulously.

"Perhaps we'd better wait, if you feel that way, Harvey."

His face was set as he looked at her.

"There's only one thing I want to know," he said. "And I've got a right to know that. You're a young girl, and you're beautiful — to me, anyhow. You've

been over there with a lot of crazy foreigners." He got up again and all the bitterness of the empty months was in his voice. "Did any of them — was there anybody there you cared about?"

"I came back, Harvey."

"That's not the question."

"There were many men — officers — who were kind to me. I ——"

"That's not the question, either."

"If I had loved any one more than I loved you I should not have come back."

"Wait a minute!" he said quickly. "You had to come back, you know."

"I could have stayed. The Englishwoman who took over my work asked me to stay on and help her."

He was satisfied then. He went back to the arm of her chair and kissed her.

"All right," he said. "I've suffered the tortures of the damned, but — that fixes it. Now let's talk about something else. I'm sick of this war talk."

"I'd like to tell you about my little house. And poor René ——"

"Who was René?" he demanded.

"The orderly."

"The one on the step, with a rifle?"

"Yes."

"Look here," he said. "I've got to get to all that gradually. I don't know that I'll ever get to it cheerfully. But I can't talk about that place to-night. And I don't want to talk war. The whole business makes

me sick. I've got a car out of it, and if things keep on we may be able to get the Leete house. But there's no reason in it, no sense. I'm sick to death of hearing about it. Let's talk of something else."

But — and here was something strange — Sara Lee could find nothing else to talk about. The thing that she had looked forward so eagerly to telling — that was barred. And the small gossip of their little circle, purely personal and trivial, held only faint interest for her. For the first time they had no common ground to meet on.

Yet it was a very happy man who went whistling to his room that night. He was rather proud of himself too. After all the bitterness of the past months, he had been gentle and loving to Sara Lee. He had not scolded her.

In the next room he could hear her going quietly about, opening and closing the drawers of the new bureau, moving a chair. Pretty soon, God willing, they need never be separated. He would have her always, to protect and cherish and love.

He went outside to her closed door.

"Good night, sweetheart," he called softly.

"Good night, dear," came her soft reply.

But long after he was asleep Sara Lee stood at her window and listened to the leaves, so like the feet of weary men on the ruined street over there.

For the first time she was questioning the thing she had done. She loved Harvey — but there were many kinds of love. There was the love of Jean for Henri,

and there was the wonderful love, though the memory now was cruel and hurt her, of Henri for herself. And there was the love of Marie for the memory of Maurice the spy. Many kinds of love; and one heart might love many people, in different ways.

A small doubt crept into her mind. This feeling she had for Harvey was not what she had thought it was over there. It was a thing that had belonged to a certain phase of her life. But that phase was over. It was, like Marie's, but a memory.

This Harvey of the new car and the increased income and the occasional hardness in his voice was not the Harvey she had left. Or perhaps it was she who had changed. She wondered. She felt precisely the same, tender toward her friends, unwilling to hurt them. She did not want to hurt Harvey.

But she did not love him as he deserved to be loved. And she had a momentary lift of the veil, when she saw the long vista of the years, the two of them always together and always between them hidden, untouched, but eating like a cancer, Harvey's resentment and suspicion of her months away from him.

There would always be a barrier between them. Not only on Harvey's side. There were things she had no right to tell — of Henri, of his love and care for her, and of that last terrible day when he realized what he had done.

That night, lying in the new bed, she faced that situation too. How much was she to blame? If Henri felt that each life lost was lost by him, wasn't the same true

for her? Why had she allowed him to stay in London?

But that was one question she did not answer frankly.

She lay there in the darkness and wondered what punishment he would receive. He had done so much for them over there. Surely, surely, they would allow for that. But small things came back to her — the awful sight of the miller and his son, led away to death, with the sacks over their heads. The relentlessness of it all, the expecting that men should give everything, even life itself, and ask for no mercy.

And this, too, she remembered: Once in a wild moment Henri had said he would follow her to America, and that there he would prove to her that his and not Harvey's was the real love of her life — the great love, that comes but once to any woman, and to some not at all. Yet on that last night at Morley's he had said what she now felt was a final farewell. That last look of his, from the doorway — that had been the look of a man who would fill his eyes for the last time.

She got up and stood by the window. What had they done to him? What would they do? She looked at her watch. It was four o'clock in the morning over there. The little house would be quiet now, but down along the lines men would be standing on the firing step of the trench, and waiting, against what the dawn might bring.

Through the thin wall came the sound of Harvey's

heavy, regular breathing. She remembered Henri's light sleeping on the kitchen floor, his cap on the table, his cape rolled round him — a sleeping, for all his weariness, so light that he seemed always half conscious. She remembered the innumerable times he had come in at this hour, muddy, sometimes rather gray of face with fatigue, but always cheerful.

It was just such an hour that she found him giving hot coffee to the German prisoner. It had been but a little earlier when he had taken her to the roof and had there shown her René, lying with his face up toward the sky which had sent him death.

A hundred memories crowded — Henri's love for the Belgian soldiers, and theirs for him; his humor; his absurd riddles. There was the one he had asked René, the very day before the air attack. He had stood stiffly and frowningly before the boy, and he had asked in a highly official tone:

"What must a man be to be buried with military honors?"

"A general?"

"No."

"An officer?"

"No, no! Use your head, boy! This is very important. A mistake would be most serious."

René had shaken his head dejectedly.

"He must be dead, René," Henri had said gravely. "Entirely dead. As I said, it is well to know these things. A mistake would be unfortunate."

His blue eyes had gleamed with fun, but his face had

remained frowning. It was quite five minutes before she had heard René chuckling on the doorstep.

Was he still living, this Henri of the love of life and courting of death? Could anything so living die? And if he had died had it been because of her? She faced that squarely for the first time.

"Perhaps even beyond the stars they have need of a little house of mercy; and, God knows, wherever I am I shall have need of you."

Beyond the partition Harvey slept on, his arms under his head.

XXVI

HARVEY was clamoring for an early wedding. And indeed there were few arguments against it, save one that Sara Lee buried in her heart. Belle's house was small, and though she was welcome there, and more than that, Sara Lee knew that she was crowding the family.

Perhaps Sara Lee would have agreed in the end. There seemed to be nothing else to do, though by the end of the first week she was no longer in any doubt as to what her feeling for Harvey really was. It was kindness, affection; but it was not love. She would marry him because she had promised to, and because their small world expected her to do so; and because she could not shame him again.

For to her surprise she found that that was what he had felt — a strange, self-conscious shame, like that of a man who has been jilted. She felt that by coming back to him she had forfeited the right to break the engagement.

So every hour of every day seemed to make the thing more inevitable. Belle was embroidering towels for her in her scant leisure. Even Anna, with a second child coming, sent in her contribution to the bride's linen chest. By almost desperately insisting on a visit

to Aunt Harriet she got a reprieve of a month. And Harvey was inclined to be jealous even of that.

Sometimes, but mostly at night when she was alone, a hot wave of resentment overwhelmed her. Why should she be forced into the thing? Was there any prospect of happiness after marriage when there was so little before?

For she realized now that even Harvey was not happy. He had at last definitely refused to hear the story of the little house.

"I'd rather just forget it, honey," he said.

But inconsistently he knew she did not forget it, and it angered him. True to his insistence on ignoring those months of her absence, she made no attempt to tell him. Now and then, however, closed in the library together, they would fail of things to talk about, and Sara Lee's knitting needles would be the only sound in the room. At those times he would sit back in his chair and watch the far-away look in her eyes, and it maddened him.

From her busy life Belle studied them both, with an understanding she did not reveal. And one morning when the mail came she saw Sara Lee's face as she turned away, finding there was no letter for her, and made an excuse to follow her to her room.

The girl was standing by the window looking out. The children were playing below, and the maple trees were silent. Belle joined her there and slipped an arm round her.

"Why are you doing it, Sara Lee?" she asked.

"Doing what?"

"Marrying Harvey."

Sara Lee looked at her with startled eyes.

"I'm engaged to him, Belle. I've promised."

"Exactly," said Belle dryly. "But that's hardly a good reason, is it? It takes more than a promise." She stared down at the flock of children in the yard below. "Harvey's a man," she said. "He doesn't understand, but I do. You've got to care a whole lot, Sara Lee, if you're going to go through with it. It takes a lot of love, when it comes to having children and all that."

"He's so good, Belle. How can I hurt him?"

"You'll hurt him a lot more by marrying him when you don't love him."

"If only I could have a little time," she cried wildly. "I'm so — I'm tired, Belle. And I can't forget about the war and all that. I've tried. Sometimes I think if we could talk it over together I'd get it out of my mind."

"He won't talk about it?"

"No."

"He's my own brother, and I love him dearly. But sometimes I think he's hard. Not that he's ever ugly," she hastened to add; "but he's stubborn. There's a sort of wall in him, and he puts some things behind it. And it's like beating against a rock to try to get at them."

After a little silence she said hesitatingly:

"We've got him to think of too. He has a right to

be happy. Sometimes I've looked at you — you're so pretty, Sara Lee — and I've wondered if there wasn't some one over there who — cared for you."

"There was one man, an officer —— Oh, Belle, I can't tell you. Not *you!*"

"Why not!" asked Belle practically. "You ought to talk it out to some one, and if Harvey insists on being a fool that's his own fault."

For all the remainder of that sunny morning Sara Lee talked what was in her heart. And Belle — poor, romantic, starved Belle — heard and thrilled. She made buttonholes as she listened, but once or twice a new tone in Sara Lee's voice caused her to look up. Here was a new Sara Lee, a creature of vibrant voice and glowing eyes; and Belle was not stupid. She saw that it was Henri whose name brought the deeper note.

Sara Lee had stopped with her recall, had stopped and looked about the room with its shiny new furniture and had shivered. Belle bent over her work.

"Why don't you go back?" she asked.

Sara Lee looked at her piteously.

"How can I? There is Harvey. And the society would not send me again. It's over, Belle. All over."

After a pause Belle said: "What's become of Henri? He hasn't written, has he?"

Sara Lee got up and went to the window.

"I don't know where he is. He may be dead."

Her voice was flat and lifeless. Belle knew all that she wanted to know. She rose and gathered up her sewing.

"I'm going to talk to Harvey. You're not going to be rushed into a wedding. You're tired, and it's all nonsense. Well, I'll have to run now and dress the children."

That night Harvey and Belle had almost a violent scene. He had taken Sara Lee over the Leete house that evening. Will Leete's widow had met them there, a small sad figure in her mourning, but very composed, until she opened the door into a tiny room upstairs with a desk and a lamp in it.

"This was Will's study," she said. "He did his work here in the evenings, and I sat in that little chair and sewed. I never thought then ——" Her lips quivered.

"Pretty rotten of Will Leete to leave that little thing alone," said Harvey on their way home. "He had his fling; and she's paying for it."

But Sara Lee was silent. It was useless to try to make Harvey understand the urge that had called Will Leete across the sea to do his share for the war, and that had brought him that peace of God that passeth all understanding.

It was not a good time for Belle to put up to him her suggestion for a delay in the marriage, that evening after their return. He took it badly and insisted on sending upstairs for Sara Lee.

"Did you ask Belle to do this?" he demanded bluntly.

"To do what?"

"To put things off."

"I have already told you, Harvey," Belle put in. "It is my own idea. She is tired. She's been through a lot. I've heard the story you're too stubborn to listen to. And I strongly advise her to wait a while."

And after a time he agreed ungraciously. He would buy the house and fix it over, and in the early fall it would be ready.

"Unless," he added to Sara Lee with a bitterness born of disappointment—"unless you change your mind again."

He did not kiss her that night when she and Belle went together up the stairs. But he stared after her gloomily, with hurt and bewilderment in his eyes.

He did not understand. He never would. She had come home to him all gentleness and tenderness, ready to find in him the things she needed so badly. But out of his obstinacy and hurt he had himself built up a barrier.

That night Sara Lee dreamed that she was back in the little house of mercy. René was there; and Henri; and Jean, with the patch over his eye. They were waiting for the men to come, and the narrow hall was full of the odor of Marie's soup. Then she heard them coming, the shuffling of many feet on the road. She went to the door, with Henri beside her, and watched them coming up the road, a deeper shadow in the blackness — tired men, wounded men, homeless men coming to her little house with its firelight and its

warmth. Here and there the match that lighted a cigarette showed a white but smiling face. They stopped before the door, and the warm little house, with its guarded lights and its food and cheer, took them in.

XXVII

A VERY pale and desperate Henri took the night train for Folkestone after he had said good-by to Sara Lee. He alternately chilled and burned with fever, and when he slept, as he did now and then, going off suddenly into a doze and waking with a jerk, it was to dream of horrors.

He thought, in his wilder intervals, of killing himself. But his code did not include such a shirker's refuge. He was going back to tell his story and to take his punishment.

He had cabled to Jean to meet him at Calais, but when, at dawn the next morning, the channel boat drew in to the wharf there was no sign of Jean or the car. Henri regarded the empty quay with apathetic eyes. They would come, later on. If he could only get his head down and sleep for a while he would be better able to get toward the Front. For he knew now that he was ill. He had, indeed, been ill for days, but he did not realize that. And he hated illness. He regarded it with suspicion, as a weakness not for a strong man.

The drowsy girl in her chair at the Gare Maritime regarded him curiously and with interest. Many women turned to look after Henri, but he did not know this. Had he known it he would have regarded it much as he did illness.

The stupid boy was not round. The girl herself took the key and led the way down the long corridor upstairs to a room. Henri stumbled in and fell across the bed. He was almost immediately asleep.

Late in the afternoon he wakened. Strange that Jean had not come. He got up and bathed his face. His right arm was very stiff now, and pains ran from the old wound in his chest down to the fingers of his hand. He tried to exercise to limber it, and grew almost weak with pain.

At six o'clock, when Jean had not come, Henri resorted to ways that he knew of and secured a car. He had had some coffee by that time, and he felt much better — so well indeed that he sang under his breath a strange rambling song that sounded rather like René's rendering of Tipperary. The driver looked at him curiously every now and then.

It was ten o'clock when they reached La Panne. Henri went at once to the villa set high on a sand dune where the King's secretary lived. The house was dark, but in the library at the rear there was a light. He stumbled along the paths beside the house, and reached at last, after interminable miles, when the path sometimes came up almost to his eyes and again fell away so that it seemed to drop from under his feet — at last he reached the long French doors, with their drawn curtains. He opened the door suddenly and thereby surprised the secretary, who was a most dignified and rather nervous gentleman, into laying his hand on a heavy inkwell.

"I wish to see the King," said Henri in a loud tone. Because at that moment the secretary, lamp and ink-well and all, retired suddenly to a very great distance, as if one had viewed them through the reverse end of an opera glass.

The secretary knew Henri. He, too, eyed him curiously.

"The King has retired, monsieur."

"I think," said Henri in a dangerous tone, "that he will see me."

To tell the truth, the secretary rather thought so too. There was a strange rumor going round, to the effect that the boy had followed a woman to England at a critical time. Which would have been a pity, the secretary thought. There were so many women, and so few men like Henri.

The secretary considerd gravely. Henri was by that time in a chair, but it moved about so that he had to hold very tight to the arms. When he looked up again the secretary had picked up his soft black hat and was at the door.

"I shall inquire," he said. Henri saluted him stiffly, with his left hand, as he went out.

The secretary went to His Majesty's equerry, who was in the next house playing solitaire and trying to forget the family he had left on the other side of the line.

So it was that in due time Henri again traversed miles of path and pavement, between tall borders of wild sea grass, miles which perhaps were a hundred

yards. And went round the screen, and — found the King on the hearthrug. But when he drew himself stiffly to attention he overdid the thing rather and went over backward with a crash.

He was up again almost immediately, very flushed and uncomfortable. After that he kept himself in hand, but the King, who had a way all his own of forgetting his divine right to rule, and a great many other things — the King watched him gravely.

Henri sat in a chair and made a clean breast of it. Because he was feeling rather strange he told a great many things that an agent of the secret service is hardly expected to reveal to his king. He mentioned, for instance, the color of Sara Lee's eyes, and the way she bandaged, like one who had been trained.

Once, in the very middle of his narrative, where he had put the letter from the Front in his pocket and decided to go to England anyhow, he stopped and hummed René's version of Tipperary. Only a bar or two. Then he remembered.

But one thing brought him round with a start.

"Then," said the King slowly, "Jean was not with you?"

Only he did not call him Jean. He gave him his other name, which, like Henri's, is not to be told.

Henri's brain cleared then with the news that Jean was missing. When, somewhat later, he staggered out of the villa, it was under royal instructions to report to the great hospital along the sea front and near by, and there to go to bed and have a doctor. Indeed,

because the boy's eyes were wild by that time, the equerry went along and held his arm. But that was because Henri was in open revolt, and while walking steadily enough showed a tendency to bolt every now and then.

He would stop on the way and argue, though one does not argue easily with an equerry.

"I must go," he would say fretfully. "God knows where he is. He'd never give me up if I were the one."

And once he shook off the equerry violently and said:

"Let go of me, I tell you! I'll come back and go to bed when I've found him."

The equerry soothed him like a child.

An English nurse took charge of Henri in the hospital, and put him to bed. He was very polite to her, and extremely cynical. She sat in a chair by his bed and held the key of the room in her hand. Once he thought she was Sara Lee, but that was only for a moment. She did not look like Sara Lee. And she was suspicious, too; for when he asked her what she could put in her left hand that she could not put in her right, she moved away and placed the door key on the stand, out of reach.

However, toward morning she dozed. There was steady firing at Nieuport and the windows shook constantly. An ambulance came in, followed by a stirring on the lower floor. Then silence. He got up then and secured the key. There was no time for dressing,

because she was a suspicious person and likely to waken at any time. He rolled his clothing into a bundle and carried it under his well arm. The other was almost useless.

The ambulance was still waiting outside, at the foot of the staircase. There were voices and lights in the operating room, forward along the tiled hall. Still in his night clothing, Henri got into the ambulance and threw his uniform behind him. Then he got the car under way.

Outside the village he paused long enough to dress. His head was amazingly clear. He had never felt so sure of himself before. As to his errand he had no doubt whatever. Jean had learned that he had crossed the channel. Therefore Jean had taken up his work — Jean, who had but one eye and was as clumsy as a bear. The thought of Jean crawling through the German trenches set him laughing until he ended with a sob.

It was rather odd about the ambulance. It did not keep the road very well. Sometimes it was on one side and sometimes on the other. It slid as though the road were greased. And after a time Henri made an amazing discovery. He was not alone in the car.

He looked back, without stopping, and the machine went off in a wide arc. He brought it back again, grinning.

"Thought you had me, didn't you?" he observed to the car in general, and the engine in particular. "Now — no tricks!"

There was a wounded man in the car. He had had morphia and he was very comfortable. He was not badly hurt, and he considered that he was being taken to Calais. He was too tired to talk, and the swinging of the car rather interested him. He would doze and waken and doze again. But at last he heard something that made him rise on his elbow.

It was the hammering of the big guns.

He called Henri's attention to this, but Henri said:

"Lie down, Jean, and don't talk. We'll make it yet."

The wounded man intended to make a protest, but he went to sleep instead.

They had reached the village now where was the little house of mercy. The ambulance rolled and leaped down the street, with both lights full on, which was forbidden, and came to a stop at the door. The man inside was grunting then, and Henri, whose head had never been so clear, got out and went round to the rear of the car.

"Now, out with you, comrade!" he said. "I have made an error, but it is immaterial. Can you walk?"

He lighted a cigarette, and the man inside saw his burning eyes and shaking hands. Even through the apathy of the morphia he felt a thrill of terror. He could walk. He got out while Henri pounded at the door.

"*Attention!*" he called. "*Attention!*"

Then he hummed an air of the camps:

Trou là là, ça ne va guère;
Trou là là, ça ne va pas.

When he heard steps inside Henri went back to the ambulance. He got in and drove it, lights and all, down the street.

Trou là là, ça ne va guère;
Trou là là, ça ne va pas.

Somewhere down the road beyond the poplar trees he abandoned the ambulance. They found it there the next morning, or rather what was left of it. Evidently its two unwinking eyes had got on the Germans' nerves.

Early the next morning a Saxon regiment, standing on the firing step ready for what the dawn might bring forth, watched the mist rise from the water in front of them. It shone on a body in a Belgian uniform, lying across their wire, and very close indeed.

Now the Saxons are not Prussians, so no one for sport fired at the body. Which was rather a good thing, because it moved slightly and stirred. And then in a loud voice, which is an unusual thing for bodies to possess, it began to sing:

Trou là là, ça ne va guère;
Trou là là, ça ne va pas.

XXVIII

LATE in August Sara Lee broke her engagement with Harvey. She had been away, at Cousin Jennie's, for a month, and for the first time since her return she had had time to think. In the little suburban town there were long hours of quiet when Cousin Jennie mended on the porch and Aunt Harriet, enjoying a sort of reflected glory from Sara Lee, presided at Red Cross meetings.

Sara Lee decided to send for Harvey, and he came for a week-end, arriving pathetically eager, but with a sort of defiance too. He was determined to hold her, but to hold her on his own terms.

Aunt Harriet had been vaguely uneasy, but Harvey's arrival seemed to put everything right. She even kissed him when he came, and took great pains to carry off Cousin Jennie when she showed an inclination toward conversation and a seat on the porch.

Sara Lee had made a desperate resolve. She intended to lay all her cards on the table. He should know all that there was to know. If, after that, he still wanted to hold her — but she did not go so far. She was so sure he would release her.

It was a despairing thing to do, but she was rather despairing those days. There had been no letter from Henri or from Jean. She had written them both several times, to Dunkirk, to the Savoy in London, to the

little house near the Front. But no replies had come. Yet mail was going through. Mabel Andrews' letters from Boulogne came regularly.

When August went by, with no letters save Harvey's, begging her to come back, she gave up at last. In the little church on Sundays, with Jennie on one side and Aunt Harriet on the other, she voiced small silent prayers — that the thing she feared had not happened. But she could not think of Henri as not living. He was too strong, too vital.

She did not understand herself those days. She was desperately unhappy. Sometimes she wondered if it would not be easier to know the truth, even if that truth comprehended the worst.

Once she received, from some unknown hand, a French journal, and pored over it for days with her French dictionary, to find if it contained any news. It was not until a week later that she received a letter from Mabel, explaining that she had sent the journal, which contained a description of her hospital.

All of Harvey's Sunday she spent in trying to bring her courage to the point of breaking the silence he had imposed on her, but it was not until evening that she succeeded. The house was empty. The family had gone to church. On the veranda, with the heavy scent of phlox at night permeating the still air, Sara Lee made her confession. She began at the beginning. Harvey did not stir — until she told of the way she had stowed away to cross the channel. Then he moved.

"This fellow who planned that for you — did you ever see him again?"

"He met me in Calais."

"And then what?"

"He took me to Dunkirk in his car. Such a hideous car, Harvey — all wrecked. It had been under fire again and again. I ——"

"He took you to Dunkirk! Who was with you?"

"Just Jean, the chauffeur."

"I like his nerve! Wasn't there in all that God-forsaken country a woman to take with you? You and this —— What was his name, anyhow?"

"I can't tell you that, Harvey."

"Look here!" he burst out. "How much of this aren't you going to tell? Because I want it all or not at all."

"I can't tell you his name. I'm only trying to make you understand the way I feel about things. His name doesn't matter." She clenched her hands in the darkness. "I don't think he is alive now."

He tried to see her face, but she turned it away.

"Dead, eh? What makes you think that?"

"I haven't heard from him."

"Why should you hear from him?" His voice cut like a knife. "Look at me. Why should he write to you?"

"He cared for me, Harvey."

He sat in a heavy silence which alarmed her.

"Don't be angry, please," she begged. "I couldn't bear it. It wasn't my fault, or his either."

"The damned scoundrel!" said Harvey thickly.

But she reached over and put a trembling hand over his lips.

"Don't say that," she said. "Don't! I won't allow you to. When I think what may have happened to him, I ——" Her voice broke.

"Go on," Harvey said in cold tones she had never heard before. "Tell it all, now you've begun it. God knows I didn't want to hear it. He took you to the hotel at Dunkirk, the way those foreigners take their women. And he established you in the house at the Front, I suppose, like a ——"

Sara Lee suddenly stood up and drew off her ring.

"You needn't go on," she said quietly. "I had a decision to make to-night, and I have made it. Ever since I came home I have been trying to go back to where we were before I left. It isn't possible. You are what you always were, Harvey. But I've changed. I can't go back."

She put the ring into his hand.

"It isn't that you don't love me. I think you do. But I've been thinking things over. It isn't only to-night, or what you just said. It's because we don't care for the same things, or believe in them."

"But — if we love each other ——"

"It's not that, either. I used to feel that way. A home, and some one to care about, and a little pleasure and work."

"That ought to be enough, honey."

He was terrified. His anger was gone. He placed an appealing hand on her arm, and as she stood there in the faint starlight the wonder of her once again got him by the throat. She had that sort of repressed eagerness, that look of being poised for flight, that had always made him feel cheap and unworthy.

"Isn't that enough, honey?" he repeated.

"Not now," she said, her eyes turned toward the east. "These are great days, Harvey. They are greater and more terrible than any one can know who has not been there. I've been there and I know. I haven't the right to all this peace and comfort when I know how things are going over there."

Down the quiet street of the little town service was over. The last hymn had been sung. Through the open windows came the mellow sound of the minister's voice in benediction, too far away to be more than a tone, like a single deep note of the organ. Sara Lee listened. She knew the words he was saying, and she listened with her eyes turned to the east:

"The peace of God that passeth all understanding be and abide with you all, forevermore. Amen."

Sara Lee listened, and from the step below her Harvey watched her with furtive, haggard eyes. He had not heard the benediction.

"The peace of God!" she said slowly. "There is only one peace of God, Harvey. and that is service. I am going back."

"Service!" he scoffed. "You are going back to him!"

"I'm afraid he is not there any more. I am going back to work. But if he is there ——"

Harvey slid the ring into his pocket. "What if he's not there," he demanded bitterly. "If you think, after all this, that I'm going to wait, on the chance of your coming back to me, you're mistaken. I've been a laughing stock long enough."

In the light of her new decision Sara Lee viewed him for the first time with the pitiless eyes of women who have lost a faith. She saw him for what he was, not deliberately cruel, not even unkindly, but selfish, small, without vision. Harvey was for his own fireside, his office, his little family group. His labor would always be for himself and his own. Whereas Sara Lee was, now and forever, for all the world, her hands consecrated to bind up its little wounds and to soothe its great ones. Harvey craved a cheap and easy peace. She wanted no peace except that bought by service, the peace of a tired body, the peace of the little house in Belgium where, after days of torture, weary men found quiet and ease and the cheer of the open door.

XXIX

LATE in October Sara Lee went back to the little house of mercy; went unaccredited, and with her own money. She had sold her bit of property.

In London she went to the Traverses, as before. But with a difference too. For Sara Lee had learned the strangeness of the English, who are slow to friendships but who never forget. Indeed a telegram met her at Liverpool asking her to stop with them in London. She replied, refusing, but thanking them, and saying she would call the next afternoon.

Everything was the same at Morley's: Rather a larger percentage of men in uniform, perhaps; greater crowds in the square; a little less of the optimism which in the spring had predicted victory before autumn. But the same high courage, for all that.

August greeted her like an old friend. Even the waiters bowed to her, and upstairs the elderly chambermaid fussed over her like a mother.

"And you're going back!" she exclaimed. "Fancy that, now! You are brave, miss."

But her keen eyes saw a change in Sara Lee. Her smile was the same, but there were times when she forgot to finish a sentence, and she stood, that first morning, for an hour by the window, looking out as if she saw nothing.

She went, before the visit to the Traverses, to the

Church of Saint Martin in the Fields. It was empty, save for a woman in a corner, who did not kneel, but sat staring quietly before her. Sara Lee prayed an inarticulate bit of a prayer, that what the Traverses would have to tell her should not be the thing that she feared, but that, if it were, she be given courage to meet it and to go on with her work.

The Traverses would know; Mrs. Cameron was a friend. They would know about Henri, and about Jean. Soon, within the hour, she would learn everything. So she asked for strength, and then sat there for a time, letting the peace of the old church quiet her, as had the broken walls and shattered altar of that other church, across the channel.

It was rather a surprise to Sara Lee to have Mrs. Travers put her arms about her and kiss her. Mr. Travers, too, patted her hand when he took it. But they had, for all that, the reserve of their class. Much that they felt about Sara Lee they did not express even to each other.

"We are so grateful to you," Mrs. Travers said. "I am only one mother, and of course now ——" She looked down at her black dress. "But how many mothers there are who will want to thank you, when this terrible thing is over and they learn about you!"

Mr. Travers had been eying Sara Lee.

"Didn't use you up, did it?" he asked. "You're not looking quite fit."

Sara Lee was very pale just then. In a moment she would know.

"I'm quite well," she said. "I — do you hear from Mrs. Cameron?"

"Frequently. She has worked hard, but she is not young." It was Mrs. Travers who spoke. "She's afraid of the winter there. I rather think, since you want to go back, that she will be glad to turn your domain over to you for a time."

"Then — the little house is still there?"

"Indeed, yes! A very famous little house, indeed. But it is always known as your house. She has felt like a temporary chatelaine. She always thought you would come back."

Tea had come, as before. The momentary stir gave her a chance to brace herself. Mr. Travers brought her cup to her and smiled gently down at her.

"We have a plan to talk over," he said, "when you have had your tea. I hope you will agree to it."

He went back to the hearthrug.

"When I was there before," Sara Lee said, trying to hold her cup steady, "there was a young Belgian officer who was very kind to me. Indeed, all the credit for what I did belongs to him. And since I went home I haven't heard ——"

Her voice broke suddenly. Mr. Travers glanced at his wife. Not for nothing had Mrs. Cameron written her long letters to these old friends, in the quiet summer afternoons when the sun shone down on the lifeless street before the little house.

"I'm afraid we have bad news for you." Mrs. Travers put down her untasted tea. "Or rather, we

have no news. Of course," she added, seeing Sara Lee's eyes, " in this war no news may be the best — that is, he may be a prisoner."

" That," Sara Lee heard herself say, " is impossible. " If they captured him they would shoot him."

Mrs. Travers nodded silently. They knew Henri's business, too, by that time, and that there was no hope for a captured spy.

" And — Jean? "

They did not know of Jean; so she told them, still in that far-away voice. And at last Mrs. Travers brought an early letter of Mrs. Cameron's and read a part of it aloud.

" He seems to have been delirious," she read, holding her reading glasses to her eyes. " A friend of his, very devoted to him, was missing, and he learned this somehow.

" He escaped from the hospital and got away in an ambulance. He came straight here and wakened us. There had been a wounded man in the machine, and he left him on our doorstep. When I got to the door the car was going wildly toward the Front, with both lamps lighted. We did not understand then, of course, and no one thought of following it. The ambulance was found smashed by a shell the next morning, and at first we thought that he had been in it. But there was no sign that he had been, and that night one of the men from the trenches insisted that he had climbed out of a firing trench where the soldier stood, and had gone forward, bareheaded, toward the German lines.

"I am afraid it was the end. The men, however, who all loved him, do not think so. It seems that he has done miracles again and again. I understand that along the whole Belgian line they watch for him at night. The other night a German on reconnoissance got very close to our wire, and was greeted not by shots but by a wild hurrah. He was almost paralyzed with surprise. They brought him here on the way back to the prison camp, and he still looked dazed."

Sara Lee sat with her hands clenched. Mrs. Travers folded the letter and put it back into its envelope.

"How long ago was that?" Sara Lee asked in a low tone. "Because, if he was coming back at all ——"

"Four months."

Suddenly Sara Lee stood up.

"I think I ought to tell you," she said with a dead-white face, "that I am responsible. He cared for me; and I was in love with him too. Only I didn't know it then. I let him bring me to England, because — I suppose it was because I loved him. I didn't think then that it was that. I was engaged to a man at home."

"Sit down," said Mr. Travers. "My dear child, nothing can be your fault."

"He came with me, and the Germans got through. He had had word, but ——"

"Have you your salts?" Mr. Travers asked quietly of his wife.

"I'm not fainting. I'm only utterly wretched."

The Traverses looked at each other. They were English. They had taken their own great loss quietly, because it was an individual grief and must not be intruded on the sorrow of a nation. But they found this white-faced girl infinitely appealing, a small and fragile figure, to whose grief must be added, without any fault of hers, a bitter and lasting remorse.

Sara Lee stood up and tried to smile.

"Please don't worry about me," she said. "I need something to do, that's all. You see, I've been worrying for so long. If I can get to work and try to make up I'll not be so hopeless. But I am not quite hopeless, either," she added hastily. It was as though by the very word she had consigned Henri to death. "You see, I am like the men; I won't give him up. And perhaps some night he will come across from the other side, out of the dark."

Mr. Travers took her back to the hotel. When he returned from paying off the taxi he found her looking across at the square.

"Do you remember," she asked him, "the time when the little donkey was hurt over there?"

"I shall never forget it."

"And the young officer who ran out when I did, and shot the poor thing?"

Mr. Travers remembered.

"That was he — the man we have been speaking of."

For the first time that day her eyes filled with tears.

Sara Lee, at twenty, was already living in her memories.

So again the lights went down in front, and the back drop became but a veil, and invisible. And to Sara Lee there came back again some of the characters of the early *mise en scène* — marching men, forage wagons, squadrons of French cavalry escorting various staffs, commandeered farm horses with shaggy fetlocks fastened in rope corrals, artillery rumbling along rutted roads which shook the gunners almost off the limbers.

Nothing was changed — and everything There was no René to smile his adoring smile, but Marie came out, sobbing and laughing, and threw herself into the girl's arms. The little house was the same, save for a hole in the kitchen wall. There were the great piles of white bowls and the shining kettles. There was the corner of her room, patched by René's hands, now so long quiet. A few more shell holes in the street, many more little crosses in the field near the poplar trees, more Allied aëroplanes in the air — that was all that was changed.

But to Sara Lee everything was changed, for all that. The little house was grave and still, like a house of the dead. Once it had echoed to young laughter, had resounded to the noise and excitement of Henri's every entrance. Even when he was not there it was as though it but waited for him to stir it into life, and small echoes of his gayety had seemed to cling to its old walls.

Sara Lee stood on the doorstep and looked within. She had come back. Here she would work and wait, and if in the goodness of providence he should come back, here he would find her, all the empty months gone and forgotten. If he did not ——

"I shall still be calling you, and waiting," he had written. She, too, would call and wait, and if not here, then surely in the fullness of time which is eternity the call would be answered.

In October Sara Lee took charge again of the little house. Mrs. Cameron went back to England, but not until the Traverses' plan had been revealed. They would support the little house, as a memorial to the son who had died. It was, Mrs. Travers wrote, the finest tribute they could offer to his memory, that night after night tired and ill and wounded men might find sanctuary, even for a little time, under her care.

Luxuries began to come across the channel, food and dressings and tobacco. Knitted things, too; for another winter was coming, and already the frost lay white on the fields in the mornings. The little house took on a new air of prosperity. There were days when it seemed almost swaggering with opulence.

It had need of everything, however. With the prospect of a second winter, when an advance was impossible, the Germans took to hammering again. Bombardment was incessant. The little village was again under suspicion, and there came days of terror when it seemed as though even the fallen masonry must be reduced to powder. The church went entirely.

By December Sara Lee had ceased to take refuge during the bombardments. The fatalism of the Front had got her. She would die or live according to the great plan, and nothing could change that. She did not greatly care which, except for her work, and even that she felt could be carried on by another as well.

There was no news of Henri, but once the King's equerry, going by, had stopped to see her and had told her the story.

"He was ill, undoubtedly," he said. "Even when he went to London he was ill, and not responsible. The King understands that. He was a brave boy, mademoiselle."

But the last element of hope seemed to go with that verification of his illness. He was delirious, and he had gone in that condition into the filthy chill waters of the inundation. Well and sane there had been a chance, but plunging wild-eyed and reckless, into that hell across, there was none.

She did her best in the evenings to be cheerful, to take the place, in her small and serious fashion, of Henri's old gayety. But the soldiers whispered among themselves that mademoiselle was in grief, as they were, for the blithe young soldier who was gone.

What hope Sara Lee had had died almost entirely early in December. On the evening of a day when a steady rain had turned the roads into slimy pitfalls, and the ditches to canals, there came, brought by a Belgian corporal, the man who swore that Henri had passed him in his trench while the others slept, had shoved

him aside, which was unlike his usual courtesy, and had climbed out over the top.

To Sara Lee this Hutin told his story. A short man with a red beard and a kindly smile that revealed teeth almost destroyed from neglect, he was at first diffident in the extreme.

"It was the captain, mademoiselle," he asserted. "I know him well. He has often gone on his errands from near my post. I am"—he smiled—"I am usually in the front line."

"What did he do?"

"He had no cap, mademoiselle. I thought that was odd. And as you know—he does not wear his own uniform on such occasions. But he wore his own uniform, so that at first I did not know what he intended."

"Later on," she asked, "you—did you hear anything?"

"The usual sniping, mademoiselle. Nothing more."

"He went through the inundation?"

"How else could he go? Through the wire first, at the barrier, where there is an opening, if one knows the way. I saw him beyond it, by the light of a fusee. There is a road there, or what was once a road. He stood there. Then the lights went out."

XXX

ON a wild night in January Sara Lee inaugurated a new branch of service. There had been a delay in sending up to the Front the men who had been on rest, and an incessant bombardment held the troops prisoners in their trenches.

A field kitchen had been destroyed. The men were hungry, disheartened, wet through. They needed her, she felt. Even the little she could do would help. All day she had made soup, and at evening Marie led from its dilapidated stable the little horse that Henri had once brought up, trundling its cart behind it. The boiler of the cart was scoured, a fire lighted in the fire box. Marie, a country girl, harnessed the shaggy little animal, but with tears of terror.

"You will be killed, mademoiselle," she protested, weeping.

"But I have gone before. Don't you remember the man whose wife was English, and how I wrote a letter for him before he died?"

"What will become of the house if you are killed?"

"Dear Marie," said Sara Lee, "that is all arranged for. You will send to Poperinghe for your aunt, and she will come until Mrs. Cameron or some one else can come from England. And you will stay on. Will you promise that?"

Marie promised in a loud wail.

"Of course I shall come back," Sara Lee said, stirring her soup preparatory to pouring it out. "I shall be very careful."

"You will not come back, mademoiselle. You do not care to live, and to such ——"

"Those are the ones who live on," said Sara Lee gravely, and poured out her soup.

She went quite alone. There was a great deal of noise, but no shells fell near her. She led the little horse by its head, and its presence gave her comfort. It had a sense that she had not, too, for it kept her on the road.

In those still early days the Belgian trenches were quite accessible from the rear. There were no long tunneled ways to traverse to reach them. One went along through the darkness until the sound of men's voices, the glare of charcoal in a busket bored with holes, the flicker of a match, told of the buried army almost underfoot or huddled in its flimsy shelters behind the railway embankment.

Beyond the lines a sentry stopped her, hailing her sharply.

"*Qui vive?*"

"It is I," she called through the rain. "I have brought some chocolate and some soup."

He lowered his bayonet.

"Pass, mademoiselle."

She went on, the rumbling of her little cart deadened by the Belgian guns.

Through the near-by trenches that night went the word that near the Repose of the Angels — which was but a hole in the ground and scarcely reposeful — there was to be had hot soup and chocolate and cigarettes. A dozen or so at a time, the men were allowed to come. Officers brought their great capes to keep the girl dry. Boards appeared as if by magic for her to stand on. The rain and the bombardment had both ceased, and a full moon made the lagoon across the embankment into a silver lake.

When the last soup had been dipped from the tall boiler, when the final drops of chocolate had oozed from the faucet, Sara Lee turned and went back to the little house again. But before she went she stood a moment staring across toward that land of the shadow on the other side, where Henri had gone and had not returned.

Once, when the King had decorated her, she had wished that, wherever Uncle James might be, on the other side, he could see what was happening. And now she wondered if Henri could know that she had come back, and was again looking after his men while she waited for that reunion he had so firmly believed in.

Then she led the little horse back along the road.

At the poplar trees she turned and looked behind, toward the trenches. The grove was but a skeleton now, a strange and jagged thing of twisted branches, as though it had died in agony. She stood there while the pony nuzzled her gently. If she called, would he

come? But, then, all of life was one call now, for her. She went on slowly.

After that it was not unusual for her to go to the trenches, on such nights as no men could come to the little house. Always she was joyously welcomed, and always on her way back she turned to send from the poplar trees that inarticulate aching call that she had come somehow to believe in.

January, wet and raw, went by; February, colder, with snow, was half over. The men had ceased to watch for Henri over the parapet, and his brave deeds had become fireside tales, to be told at home, if ever there were to be homes again for them.

Then one night Henri came back — came as he had gone, out of the shadows that had swallowed him up; came without so much as the sound of a sniper's rifle to herald him. A strange, thin Henri, close to starvation, dripping water over everything from a German uniform, and very close indeed to death before he called out.

There was wild excitement indeed. Bearded private soldiers, forgetting that name and rank of his which must not be told, patted his thin shoulders. Officers who had lived through such horrors as also may not be told, crowded about him and shook hands with him, and with each other.

It was as though from the graveyard back in the fields had come, alive and smiling, some dearly beloved friend.

He would have told the story, but he was wet and weary.

"That can wait," they said, and led him, a motley band of officers and men intermixed, for once forgetting all decorum, toward the village. They overtook the lines of men who had left the trenches and were moving with their slow and weary gait up the road. The news spread through the column. There were muffled cheers. Figures stepped out of the darkness with hands out. Henri clasped as many as he could.

When with his escort he had passed the men they fell, almost without orders, into columns of four, and swung in behind him. There was no band, but from a thousand throats, yet cautiously until they passed the poplar trees, there gradually swelled and grew a marching song.

Behind Henri a strange guard of honor — muddy, tired, torn, even wounded — they marched and sang:

Trou là là, ça ne va guère;
Trou là là, ce ne va pas.

Sara Lee, listening for that first shuffle of many feet that sounded so like the wind in the trees or water over the pebbles of a brook, paused in her work and lifted her head. The rhythm of marching feet came through the wooden shutters. The very building seemed to vibrate with it. And there was a growling sound with it that soon she knew to be the deep voices of singing men.

She went to the door and stood there, looking down the street. Behind her was the warm glow of the lamp, all the snug invitation of the little house.

A group of soldiers had paused in front of the doorway, and from them one emerged — tall, white, infinitely weary — and looked up at her with unbelieving eyes.

After all, there are no words for such meetings. Henri took her hand, still with that sense of unreality, and bent over it. And Sara Lee touched his head as he stooped, because she had called for so long, and only now he had come.

"So you have come back!" she said in what she hoped was a composed tone — because a great many people were listening. He raised his head then and looked at her.

"It is you who have come back, mademoiselle."

There was gayety in the little house that night. Every candle was lighted. They were stuck in rows on mantel-shelves. They blazed — and melted into strange arcs — above the kitchen stove. There were cigarettes for everybody, and food; and a dry uniform, rather small, for Henri. Marie wept over her soup, and ran every few moments to the door to see if he was still there. She had kissed him on both cheeks when he came in, and showed signs, every now and then, of doing it again.

Sara Lee did her bandaging as usual, but with shining eyes. And soon after Henri's arrival a dispatch

rider set off post haste with certain papers and maps, hurriedly written and drawn. Henri had not only returned, he had brought back information of great value to all the Allied armies.

So Sara Lee bandaged, and in the little room across the way, where no longer Harvey's photograph sat on the mantel, Henri told his story to the officers — of his imprisonment in the German prison at Crefeld; of his finding Jean there, weeks later when he was convalescing from typhoid; of their escape and long wandering; of Jean's getting into Holland, whence he would return by way of England. Of his own business, of what he had done behind the lines after Jean had gone, he said nothing. But his listeners knew and understood.

But his dispatches off, his story briefly told, Henri wandered out among the men again. He was very happy. He had never thought to be so happy. He felt the touch on his sleeves of hard brown, not overclean hands, infinitely tender and caressing; and over there, as though she had never gone, was Sara Lee, slightly flushed and very radiant.

And as though he also had never gone away, Henri pushed into the *salle à manger* and stood before her smiling.

"You bandage well, mademoiselle," he said gayly. "But I? I bandage better! See now, a turn here, and it is done! Does it hurt, Paul?"

The man in the dressing chair squirmed and grinned sheepishly.

"The iodine," he explained. "It is painful."

"Then I shall ask you a question, and you will forget the iodine. Why is a dead German like the tail of a pig?"

Paul failed. The room failed. Even Colonel Lilias confessed himself at fault.

"Because it is the end of the swine," explained Henri, and looked about him triumphantly. A gust of laughter spread through the room and even to the kitchen. A door banged. Henri upset a chair. There was noise again, and gayety in the little house of mercy. And much happiness.

And there I think we may leave them all — Henri and Sara Lee; and Jean of the one eye and the faithful heart; and Marie, with her kettles; and even René, who still in some strange way belonged to the little house, as though it were something too precious to abandon.

The amazing interlude had become the play itself. Never again for Sara Lee would the lights go up in front, and Henri with his adoring eyes and open arms fade into the shadows.

The drama of the war plays on. The Great Playwright sees fit, now and then, to take away some well-beloved players. New faces appear and disappear. The music is the thunder of many guns. Henri still plays his big part, Sara Lee her little one. Yet who shall say, in the end, which one has done the better? There are new and ever new standards, but love remains the chief. And love is Sara Lee's one quality —

love of her kind, of tired men and weary, the love that shall one day knit this broken world together. And love of one man.

On weary nights, when Henri is again lost in the shadows, Sara Lee, her work done, the men gone, sits in her little house of mercy and waits. The stars on clear evenings shine down on the roofless buildings, on the rubbish that was once the mill, on the ruined poplar trees, and on the small acre of peace where tiny crosses mark the long sleep of weary soldiers.

And sometimes, though she knows it now by heart, she reads aloud that letter of Henri's to her. It comforts her. It is a promise.

"If that is to be, then think of me, somewhere, perhaps with René by my side, since he. too, loved you. And I shall still be calling you, and waiting. Perhaps, even beyond the stars, they have need of a little house of mercy. And God knows, wherever I am, I shall have need of you."

(THE END)

III

THE STREET OF SEVEN STARS

The Street of Seven Stars

CHAPTER I

THE old stucco house sat back in a garden, or what must once have been a garden, when that part of the Austrian city had been a royal game preserve. Tradition had it that the Empress Maria Theresa had used the building as a hunting-lodge, and undoubtedly there was something royal in the proportions of the salon. With all the candles lighted in the great glass chandelier, and no sidelights, so that the broken paneling was mercifully obscured by gloom, it was easy to believe that the great empress herself had sat in one of the tall old chairs and listened to anecdotes of questionable character; even, if tradition may be believed, related not a few herself.

The chandelier was not lighted on this rainy November night. Outside in the garden the trees creaked and bent before the wind, and the heavy barred gate, left open by the last comer, a piano student named Scatchett and dubbed "Scatch" — the gate slammed to and fro monotonously, giving now and then just enough pause for a hope

that it had latched itself, a hope that was always destroyed by the next gust.

One candle burned in the salon. Originally lighted for the purpose of enabling Miss Scatchett to locate the score of a Tschaikowsky concerto, it had been moved to the small center table, and had served to give light if not festivity to the afternoon coffee and cakes. It still burned, a gnarled and stubby fragment, in its china holder; round it the disorder of the recent refreshment, three empty cups, a half of a small cake, a crumpled napkin or two, — there were never enough to go round, — and on the floor the score of the concerto, clearly abandoned for the things of the flesh.

The room was cold. The long casement windows creaked in time with the slamming of the gate and the candle flickered in response to a draft under the doors. The concerto flapped and slid along the uneven old floor. At the sound a girl in a black dress, who had been huddled near the tile stove, rose impatiently and picked it up. There was no impatience, however, in the way she handled the loose sheets. She put them together carefully, almost tenderly, and placed them on the top of the grand piano, anchoring them against the draft with a china dog from the stand.

The room was very bare — a long mirror between two of the windows, half a dozen chairs, a

stand or two, and in a corner the grand piano. There were no rugs — the bare floor stretched bleakly into dim corners and was lost. The crystal pendants of the great chandelier looked like stalactites in a cave. The girl touched the piano keys; they were ice under her fingers.

In a sort of desperation she drew a chair underneath the chandelier, and armed with a handful of matches proceeded to the unheard-of extravagance of lighting it, not here and there, but throughout as high as she could reach, standing perilously on her tiptoes on the chair.

The resulting illumination revealed a number of things: It showed that the girl was young and comely and that she had been crying; it revealed the fact that the coal-pail was empty and the stove almost so; it let the initiated into the secret that the blackish fluid in the cups had been made with coffee extract that had been made of Heaven knows what; and it revealed in the cavernous corner near the door a number of trunks. The girl, having lighted all the candles, stood on the chair and looked at the trunks. She was very young, very tragic, very feminine. A door slammed down the hall and she stopped crying instantly. Diving into one of those receptacles that are a part of the mystery of the sex, she rubbed a chamois skin over her nose and her reddened eyelids.

The situation was a difficult one, but hardly, except to Harmony Wells, a tragedy. Few of us are so constructed that the Suite "Arlesienne" will serve as a luncheon, or a faulty fingering of the Waldweben from "Siegfried" will keep us awake at night. Harmony had lain awake more than once over some crime against her namesake, had paid penances of early rising and two hours of scales before breakfast, working with stiffened fingers in her cold little room where there was no room for a stove, and sitting on the edge of the bed in a faded kimono where once pink butterflies sported in a once blue-silk garden. Then coffee, rolls, and honey, and back again to work, with little Scatchett at the piano in the salon beyond the partition, wearing a sweater and fingerless gloves and holding a hot-water bottle on her knees. Three rooms beyond, down the stone hall, the Big Soprano, doing Madama Butterfly in bad German, helped to make an encircling wall of sound in the center of which one might practice peacefully.

Only the Portier objected. Morning after morning, crawling out at dawn from under his featherbed in the lodge below, he opened his door and listened to Harmony doing penance above; and morning after morning he shook his fist up the stone staircase.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" he would say to his wife,

fumbling with the knot of his mustache bandage, "what a people, these Americans! So much noise and no music!"

"And mad!" grumbled his wife. "All the day coal, coal to heat; and at night the windows open! Karl the milkboy has seen it."

And now the little colony was breaking up. The Big Soprano was going back to her church, grand opera having found no place for her. Scatch was returning to be married, her heart full, indeed, of music, but her head much occupied with the trousseau in her trunks. The Harmar sisters had gone two weeks before, their funds having given out. Indeed, funds were very low with all of them. The "*Bitte zum speisen*" of the little German maid often called them to nothing more opulent than a stew of beef and carrots.

Not that all had been sordid. The butter had gone for opera tickets, and never was butter better spent. And there had been gala days — a fruitcake from Harmony's mother, a venison steak at Christmas, and once or twice on birthdays real American ice cream at a fabulous price and worth it. Harmony had bought a suit, too, a marvel of tailoring and cheapness, and a willow plume that would have cost treble its price in New York. Oh, yes, gala days, indeed, to offset the butter and the rainy winter and the faltering technic and the anxiety about money. For that

they all had always, the old tragedy of the American music student abroad — the expensive lessons, the delays in getting to the Master himself, the contention against German greed or Austrian whim. And always back in one's mind the home people, to whom one dares not confess that after nine months of waiting, or a year, one has seen the Master once or not at all.

Or — and one of the Harmar girls had carried back this sear in her soul — to go back rejected, as one of the unfit, on whom even the undermasters refuse to waste time. That has been, and often. Harmony stood on her chair and looked at the trunks. The Big Soprano was calling down the hall.

"Scatch," she was shouting briskly, "where is my hairbrush?"

A wail from Scatch from behind a closed door.

"I packed it, Heaven knows where! Do you need it really? Have n't you got a comb?"

"As soon as I get something on I'm coming to shake you. Half the teeth are out of my comb. I don't believe you packed it. Look under the bed."

Silence for a moment, while Scatch obeyed for the next moment.

"Here it is," she called joyously. "And here are Harmony's bedroom slippers. Oh, Harry, I found your slippers!"

The girl got down off the chair and went to the door.

"Thanks, dear," she said. "I'm coming in a minute."

She went to the mirror, which had reflected the Empress Maria Theresa, and looked at her eyes. They were still red. Perhaps if she opened the window the air would brighten them.

Armed with the brush, little Scatchett hurried to the Big Soprano's room. She flung the brush on the bed and closed the door. She held her shabby wrapper about her and listened just inside the door. There were no footsteps, only the banging of the gate in the wind. She turned to the Big Soprano, heating a curling iron in the flame of a candle, and held out her hand.

"Look!" she said. "Under my bed! Ten kronen!"

Without a word the Big Soprano put down her curling-iron, and ponderously getting down on her knees, candle in hand, inspected the dusty floor beneath her bed. It revealed nothing but a cigarette, on which she pounced. Still squatting, she lighted the cigarette in the candle flame and sat solemnly puffing it.

"The first for a week," she said. "Pull out the wardrobe, Scatch; there may be another relic of my prosperous days."

But little Scatchett was not interested in Austrian cigarettes with a government monopoly and gilt tips. She was looking at the ten-kronen piece.

"Where is the other?" she asked in a whisper.

"In my powder-box."

Little Scatchett lifted the china lid and dropped in the tiny gold-piece.

"Every little bit," she said flippantly, but still in a whisper, "added to what she's got, makes just a little bit more."

"Have you thought of a place to leave it for her? If Rosa finds it, it's good-bye. Heaven knows it was hard enough to get together, without losing it now. I'll have to jump overboard and swim ashore at New York — I have n't even a dollar for tips."

"New York!" said little Scatchett with her eyes glowing. "If Henry meets me I know he will —"

"Tut!" The Big Soprano got up cumbrously and stood looking down. "You and your Henry! Scatchy, child, has it occurred to your maudlin young mind that money is n't the only thing Harmony is going to need? She's going to be alone — and this is a bad town to be alone in. And she is not like us. You have your Henry. I'm a beefy person who has a stomach, and I'm thankful for it. But she is different — she's got the

thing that you are as well without, the thing that my lack of is sending me back to fight in a church choir instead of grand opera."

Little Scatchett was rather puzzled.

"Temperament?" she asked. It had always been accepted in the little colony that Harmony was a real musician, a star in their lesser firmament.

The Big Soprano sniffed.

"If you like," she said. "Soul is a better word. Only the rich ought to have souls, Scatchy, dear."

This was over the younger girl's head, and anyhow Harmony was coming down the hall.

"I thought, under her pillow," she whispered. "She'll find it —"

Harmony came in, to find the Big Soprano heating a curler in the flame of a candle.

CHAPTER II

HARMONY found the little hoard under her pillow that night when, having seen Scatch and the Big Soprano off at the station, she had come back alone to the apartment on the Siebensternstrasse. The trunks were gone now. Only the concerto score still lay on the piano, where little Scatchett, mentally on the dock at New York with Henry's arms about her, had forgotten it. The candles in the great chandelier had died in tears of paraffin that spattered the floor beneath. One or two of the sockets were still smoking, and the sharp odor of burning wick-ends filled the room.

Harmony had come through the garden quickly. She had had an uneasy sense of being followed, and the garden, with its moaning trees and slamming gate and the great dark house in the background, was a forbidding place at best. She had rung the bell and had stood, her back against the door, eyes and ears strained in the darkness. She had fancied that a figure had stopped outside the gate and stood looking in, but the next moment the gate had swung to and the Portier was fumbling at the lock behind her.

The Portier had put on his trousers over his night garments, and his mustache bandage gave him a sinister expression, rather augmented when he smiled at her. The Portier liked Harmony in spite of the early morning practicing; she looked like a singer at the opera for whom he cherished a hidden attachment. The singer had never seen him, but it was for her he wore the mustache bandage. Perhaps some day — hopefully! One must be ready!

The Portier gave Harmony a tiny candle and Harmony held out his tip, the five Hellers of custom. But the Portier was keen, and Rosa was a niece of his wife and talked more than she should. He refused the tip with a gesture.

"Bitte, Fräulein!" he said through the bandage. "It is for me a pleasure to admit you. And perhaps if the Fräulein is cold, a basin of soup."

The Portier was not pleasant to the eye. His nightshirt was open over his hairy chest and his feet were bare to the stone floor. But to Harmony that lonely night he was beautiful. She tried to speak and could not but she held out her hand in impulsive gratitude, and the Portier in his best manner bent over and kissed it. As she reached the curve of the stone staircase, carrying her tiny candle, the Portier was

following her with his eyes. She was very like the girl of the opera.

The clang of the door below and the rattle of the chain were comforting to Harmony's ears. From the safety of the darkened salon she peered out into the garden again, but no skulking figure detached itself from the shadows, and the gate remained, for a marvel, closed.

It was when — having picked up her violin in a very passion of loneliness, only to put it down when she found that the familiar sounds echoed and reëchoed sadly through the silent rooms — it was when she was ready for bed that she found the money under her pillow, and a scrawl from Scatchy, a breathless, apologetic scrawl, little Scatchett having adored her from afar, as the plain adore the beautiful, the mediocre the gifted: —

"Dearest Harry [here a large blot, Scatchy being addicted to blots]: I am honestly frightened when I think what we are doing. But, oh, my dear, if you could know how pleased we are with ourselves you'd not deny us this pleasure. Harry, you have it — the real thing, you know, whatever it is — and I have n't. None of the rest of us had. And you must stay. To go now, just when lessons would mean everything — well, you must not think

of it. We have scads to take us home, more than we need, both of us, or at least — well, I'm lying, and you know it. But we have enough, by being careful, and we want you to have this. It isn't much, but it may help. Ten Kronen of it I found to-night under my bed, and it may be yours anyhow.

"Sadie [Sadie was the Big Soprano] keeps saying awful things about our leaving you here, and she has rather terrified me. You are so beautiful, Harry, — although you never let us tell you so. And Sadie says you have a soul and I haven't, and that souls are deadly things to have. I feel to-night that in urging you to stay I am taking the burden of your soul on me! Do be careful, Harry. If any one you do not know speaks to you call a policeman. And be sure you get into a respectable *pension*. There are queer ones.

"Sadie and I think that if you can get along on what you get from home — you said your mother would get insurance, didn't you? — and will keep this as a sort of fund to take you home if anything should go wrong —. But perhaps we are needlessly worried. In any case, of course it's a loan, and you can preserve that magnificent independence of yours by sending it back when you get to work to make your fortune. And if you are doubtful at all, just

remember that hopeful little mother of yours who sent you over to get what she had never been able to have for herself, and who planned this for you from the time you were a kiddy and she named you Harmony.

"I 'm not saying good-bye. I can't.

"SCATCH."

That night, while the Portier and his wife slept under their crimson feather beds and the crystals of the chandelier in the salon shook in the draft as if the old Austrian court still danced beneath, Harmony fought her battle. And a battle it was. Scatchy and the Big Soprano had not known everything. There had been no insurance on her father's life; the little mother was penniless. A married sister would care for her, but what then? Harmony had enough remaining of her letter-of-credit to take her home, and she had — the hoard under the pillow. To go back and teach the violin; or to stay and finish under the master, be presented, as he had promised her, at a special concert in Vienna, with all the prestige at home that that would mean, and its resulting possibility of fame and fortune — which?

She decided to stay. There might be a concert or so, and she could teach English. The

Viennese were crazy about English. Some of the stores advertised "English Spoken." That would be something to fall back on, a clerkship during the day.

Toward dawn she discovered that she was very cold, and she went into the Big Soprano's deserted and disordered room. The tile stove was warm and comfortable, but on the toilet table there lay a disreputable comb with most of the teeth gone. Harmony kissed this unromantic object! Which reveals the fact that, genius or not, she was only a young and rather frightened girl, and that every atom of her ached with loneliness.

She did not sleep at all, but sat curled up on the bed with her feet under her and thought things out. At dawn the Portier, crawling out into the cold from under his feathers, opened the door into the hall and listened. She was playing, not practicing, and the music was the barcarolle from the "Tales" of Hoffmann. Standing in the doorway in his night attire, his chest open to the frigid morning air, his face upraised to the floor above, he hummed the melody in a throaty tenor.

When the music had died away he went in and closed the door sheepishly. His wife stood over the stove, a stick of firewood in her hand. She eyed him.

"So! It is the American Fräulein now!"

"I did but hum a little. She drags out my heart with her music." He fumbled with his mustache bandage, which was knotted behind, keeping one eye on his wife, whose morning pleasure it was to untie it for him.

"She leaves to-day," she announced, ignoring the knot.

"Why? She is alone. Rosa says — "

"She leaves to-day!"

The knot was hopeless now, double-tied and pulled to smooth compactness. The Portier jerked at it.

"No Fräulein stays here alone. It is not respectable. And what saw I last night, after she entered and you stood moon-gazing up the stair after her! A man in the gateway!"

The Portier was angry. He snarled something through the bandage, which had slipped down over his mouth, and picked up a great knife.

"She will stay if she so desire," he muttered furiously, and, raising the knife, he cut the knotted string. His mustache, faintly gray and sweetly up-curled, stood revealed.

"She will stay!" he repeated. "And when you see men at the gate, let me know. She is an angel!"

"And she looks like the angel at the opera, hein?"

This was a crushing blow. The Portier wilted. Such things come from telling one's cousin, who keeps a brushshop, what is in one's heart. Yesterday his wife had needed a brush, and to-day — Himmel, the girl must go!

Harmony knew also that she must go. The apartment was large and expensive; Rosa ate much and wasted more. She must find somewhere a tiny room with board, a humble little room but with a stove. It is folly to practice with stiffened fingers. A room where her playing would not annoy people, that was important.

She paid Rosa off that morning out of money left for that purpose. Rosa wept. She said she would stay with the Fräulein for her keep, because it was not the custom for young ladies to be alone in the city — young girls of the people, of course; but beautiful young ladies, no!

Harmony gave her an extra krone or two out of sheer gratitude, but she could not keep her. And at noon, having packed her trunk, she went down to interview the Portier and his wife, who were agents under the owner for the old house.

The Portier, entirely subdued, was sweeping out the hallway. He looked past the girl, not at her, and observed impassively that the lease

was up and it was her privilege to go. In the daylight she was not so like the angel, and after all she could only play the violin. The angel had a voice, such a voice! And besides, there was an eye at the crack of the door.

The bit of cheer of the night before was gone; it was with a heavy heart that Harmony started on her quest for cheaper quarters.

Winter, which had threatened for a month, had come at last. The cobblestones glittered with ice and the small puddles in the gutters were frozen. Across the street a spotted deer, shot in the mountains the day before and hanging from a hook before a wild-game shop, was frozen quite stiff. It was a pretty creature. The girl turned her eyes away. A young man, buying cheese and tinned fish in the shop, watched after her.

"That 's an American girl, is n't it?" he asked in American-German.

The shopkeeper was voluble. Also Rosa had bought much from him, and Rosa talked. When the American left the shop he knew everything of Harmony that Rosa knew except her name. Rosa called her "The Beautiful One." Also he was short one krone four hellers in his change, which is readily done when a customer is plainly thinking of a "beautiful one."

Harmony searched all day for the little room

with board and a stove and no objection to practicing. There were plenty— but the rates! The willow plume looked prosperous, and she had a way of making the plainest garments appear costly. Landladies looked at the plume and the suit and heard the soft swish of silk beneath, which marks only self-respect in the American woman but is extravagance in Europe, and added to their regular terms until poor Harmony's heart almost stood still. And then at last toward evening she happened on a gloomy little *pension* near the corner of the Alserstrasse, and it being dark and the plume not showing, and the landlady missing the rustle owing to cotton in her ears for earache, Harmony found terms that she could meet for a time.

A mean little room enough, but with a stove. The bed sagged in the center, and the toilet-table had a mirror that made one eye appear higher than the other and twisted one's nose. But there was an odor of stewing cabbage in the air. Also, alas, there was the odor of many previous stewed cabbages, and of dusty carpets and stale tobacco. Harmony had had no lunch; she turned rather faint.

She arranged to come at once, and got out into the comparative purity of the staircase atmosphere and felt her way down. She reeled once or twice. At the bottom of the dark stairs

she stood for a moment with her eyes closed, to the dismay of a young man who had just come in with a cheese and some tinned fish under his arm.

He put down his packages on the stone floor and caught her arm.

"Not ill, are you?" he asked in English, and then remembering. "Bist du krank?" He colored violently at that, recalling too late the familiarity of the "du."

Harmony smiled faintly.

"Only tired," she said in English. "And the odor of cabbage —"

Her color had come back and she freed herself from his supporting hand. He whistled softly. He had recognized her.

"Cabbage, of course!" he said. "The *pension* upstairs is full of it. I live there, and I've eaten so much of it I could be served up with pork."

"I am going to live there. Is it as bad as that?"

He waved a hand toward the parcels on the floor.

"So bad," he observed, "that I keep body and soul together by buying strong and odorous food at the delicatessens — odorous, because only rugged flavors rise above the atmosphere up there. Cheese is the only thing that

really knocks out the cabbage, and once or twice even cheese has retired defeated."

"But I don't like cheese." In sheer relief from the loneliness of the day her spirits were rising.

"Then coffee! But not there. Coffee at the coffee-house on the corner. I say —" He hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Would you — don't you think a cup of coffee would set you up a bit?"

"It sounds attractive," — uncertainly.

"Coffee with whipped cream and some little cakes?"

Harmony hesitated. In the gloom of the hall she could hardly see this brisk young American — young, she knew by his voice, tall by his silhouette, strong by the way he had caught her. She could not see his face, but she liked his voice.

"Do you mean — with you?"

"I'm a doctor. I am going to fill my own prescription."

That sounded reassuring. Doctors were not as other men; they were legitimate friends in need.

"I am sure it is not proper, but — "

"Proper! Of course it is. I shall send you a bill for professional services. Besides, won't we

be formally introduced to-night by the landlady? Come now — to the coffee-house and the Paris edition of the 'Herald'!" But the next moment he paused and ran his hand over his chin. "I'm pretty disreputable," he explained. "I have been in a clinic all day, and, hang it all, I'm not shaved."

"What difference does that make?"

"My dear young lady," he explained gravely, picking up the cheese and the tinned fish, "it makes a difference in me that I wish you to realize before you see me in a strong light."

He rapped at the Portier's door, with the intention of leaving his parcels there, but receiving no reply tucked them under his arm. A moment later Harmony was in the open air, rather dazed, a bit excited, and lovely with the color the adventure brought into her face. Her companion walked beside her, tall, slightly stooped. She essayed a fugitive little side-glance up at him, and meeting his eyes hastily averted hers.

They passed a policeman, and suddenly there flashed into the girl's mind little Scatchett's letter.

"Do be careful, Harry. If any one you do not know speaks to you, call a policeman."

CHAPTER III

THE coffee-house was warm and bright. Round its small tables were gathered miscellaneous groups, here and there a woman, but mostly men — uniformed officers, who made of the neighborhood coffee-house a sort of club, where under their breath they criticized the Government and retailed small regimental gossip; professors from the university, still wearing under the beards of middle life the fine horizontal scars of student days; elderly doctors from the general hospital across the street; even a Hofrath or two, drinking beer and reading the "Fliegende Blaetter" and "Simplicissimus"; and in an alcove round a billiard table a group of noisy Korps students. Over all a permeating odor of coffee, strong black coffee, made with a fig or two to give it color. It rose even above the blue tobacco haze and dominated the atmosphere with its spicy and stimulating richness. A bustle of waiters, a hum of conversation, the rattle of newspapers and the click of billiard balls — this was the coffee-house.

Harmony had never been inside one before. The little music colony had been a tight-closed

corporation, retaining its American integrity, in spite of the salon of Maria Theresa and three expensive lessons a week in German. Harmony knew the art galleries and the churches, which were free, and the opera, thanks to no butter at supper. But of that backbone of Austrian life, the coffee-house, she was profoundly ignorant.

Her companion found her a seat in a corner near a heater and disappeared for an instant on the search for the Paris edition of the "Herald." The girl followed him with her eyes. Seen under the bright electric lights, he was not handsome, hardly good-looking. His mouth was wide, his nose irregular, his hair a nondescript brown,— but the mouth had humor, the nose character, and, thank Heaven, there was plenty of hair. Not that Harmony saw all this at once. As he tacked to and fro round the tables, with a nod here and a word there, she got a sort of ensemble effect — a tall man, possibly thirty, broad-shouldered, somewhat stooped, as tall men are apt to be. And shabby, undeniably shabby!

The shabbiness was a shock. A much-braided officer, trim from the points of his mustache to the points of his shoes, rose to speak to him. The shabbiness was accentuated by the contrast. Possibly the revelation was an easement to the girl's nervousness. This smiling and unpressed individual, blithely waving aloft the Paris edi-

tion of the "Herald" and equally blithely ignoring the maledictions of the student from whom he had taken it — even Scatchy could not have called him a vulture or threatened him with the police.

He placed the paper before her and sat down at her side, not to interfere with her outlook over the room.

"Warmer?" he asked.

"Very much."

"Coffee is coming. And cinnamon cakes with plenty of sugar. They know me here and they know where I live. They save the sugariest cakes for me. Don't let me bother you; go on and read. See which of the smart set is getting a divorce — or is it always the same one? And who's President back home."

"I'd rather look round. It's curious, is n't it?"

"Curious? It's heavenly! It's the one thing I am going to take back to America with me — one coffee-house, one dozen military men for local color, one dozen students ditto, and one proprietor's wife to sit in the cage and short-change the unsuspecting. I'll grow wealthy."

"But what about the medical practice?"

He leaned over toward her; his dark-gray eyes fulfilled the humorous promise of his mouth.

"Why, it will work out perfectly," he said whimsically. "The great American public will eat cinnamon cakes and drink coffee until the feeble American nervous system will be shattered. I shall have an office across the street!"

After that, having seen how tired she looked, he forbade conversation until she had had her coffee. She ate the cakes, too, and he watched her with comfortable satisfaction.

"Nod your head but don't speak," he said. "Remember, I am prescribing, and there's to be no conversation until the coffee is down. Shall I or shall I not open the cheese?"

But Harmony did not wish the cheese, and so signified. Something inherently delicate in the unknown kept him from more than an occasional swift glance at her. He read aloud, as she ate, bits of news from the paper, pausing to sip his own coffee and to cast an eye over the crowded room. Here and there an officer, gazing with too open admiration on Harmony's lovely face, found himself fixed by a pair of steel-gray eyes that were anything but humorous at that instant, and thought best to shift his gaze.

The coffee finished, the girl began to gather up her wraps. But the unknown protested.

"The function of a coffee-house," he explained

gravely, "is twofold. Coffee is only the first half. The second half is conversation."

"I converse very badly."

"So do I. Suppose we talk about ourselves. We are sure to do that well. Shall I commence?"

Harmony was in no mood to protest. Having swallowed coffee, why choke over conversation? Besides, she was very comfortable. It was warm there, with the heater at her back; better than the little room with the sagging bed and the doors covered with wall paper. Her feet had stopped aching, too. She could have sat there for hours. And — why evade it? — she was interested. This whimsical and respectful young man with his absurd talk and his shabby clothes had roused her curiosity.

"Please," she assented.

"Then, first of all, my name. I 'm getting that over early, because it is n't much, as names go. Peter Byrne it is. Don't shudder."

"Certainly I 'm not shuddering."

"I have another name, put in by my Irish father to conciliate a German uncle of my mother's. Augustus! It 's rather a mess. What shall I put on my professional brassplate? If I put P. Augustus Byrne nobody's fooled. They know my wretched first name is Peter."

"Or Patrick."

"I rather like Patrick—if I thought it might

pass as Patrick! Patrick has possibilities. The diminutive is Pat, and that's not bad. But Peter!"

"Do you know," Harmony confessed half shyly, "I like Peter as a name."

"Peter it shall be, then. I go down to posterity and fame as Peter Byrne. The rest does n't amount to much, but I want you to know it, since you have been good enough to accept me on faith. I 'm here alone, from a little town in eastern Ohio; worked my way through a coeducational college in the West and escaped unmarried; did two years in a dry-goods store until, by saving and working in my vacations, I got through medical college and tried general practice. Did n't like it — always wanted to do surgery. A little legacy from the German uncle, trying to atone for the 'Augustus,' gave me enough money to come here. I 've got a chance with the Days — surgeons, you know — when I go back, if I can hang on long enough. That 's all. Here 's a traveler's check with my name on it, to vouch for the truth of this thrilling narrative. Gaze on it with awe; there are only a few of them left!"

Harmony was as delicately strung, as vibratingly responsive as the strings of her own violin, and under the even lightness of his tone she felt many things that met a response in her —

loneliness and struggle, and the ever-present anxiety about money, grim determination, hope and fear, and even occasional despair. He was still young, but there were lines in his face and a hint of gray in his hair. Even had he been less frank, she would have known soon enough — the dingy little pension, the shabby clothes —

She held out her hand.

"Thank you for telling me," she said simply. "I think I understand very well because — it 's music with me: violin. And my friends have gone, so I am alone, too."

He leaned his elbows on the table and looked out over the crowd without seeing it.

"It 's curious, is n't it?" he said. "Here we are, you and I, meeting in the center of Europe, both lonely as the mischief, both working our heads off for an idea that may never pan out! Why are n 't you at home to-night, eating a civilized beefsteak and running upstairs to get ready for a nice young man to bring you a box of chocolates? Why am I not measuring out calico in Shipley & West's? Instead, we are going to Frau Schwarz', to listen to cold ham and scorched compôte eaten in six different languages."

Harmony made no immediate reply. He seemed to expect none. She was drawing on her gloves, her eyes, like his, roving over the crowd.

Far back among the tables a young man rose and yawned. Then, seeing Byrne, he waved a greeting to him. Byrne's eyes, from being introspective, became watchful.

The young man was handsome in a florid, red-cheeked way, with black hair and blue eyes. Unlike Byrne, he was foppishly neat. He was not alone. A slim little Austrian girl, exceedingly chic, rose when he did and threw away the end of a cigarette.

"Why do we go so soon?" she demanded fretfully in German. "It is early still."

He replied in English. It was a curious way they had, and eminently satisfactory, each understanding better than he spoke the other's language.

"Because, my beloved," he said lightly, "you are smoking a great many poisonous and highly expensive cigarettes. Also I wish to speak to Peter."

The girl followed his eyes and stiffened jealously.

"Who is that with Peter?"

"We are going over to find out, little one. Old Peter with a woman at last!"

The little Austrian walked delicately, swaying her slim body with a slow and sensuous grace. She touched an officer as she passed him, and paused to apologize, to the officer's delight and

her escort's irritation. And Peter Byrne watched and waited, a line of annoyance between his brows. The girl was ahead; that complicated things.

When she was within a dozen feet of the table he rose hastily, with a word of apology, and met the couple. It was adroitly done. He had taken the little Austrian's arm and led her by the table while he was still greeting her. He held her in conversation in his absurd German until they had reached the swinging doors, while her companion followed helplessly. And he bowed her out, protesting his undying admiration for her eyes, while the florid youth alternately raged behind him and stared back at Harmony, interested and unconscious behind her table.

The little Austrian was on the pavement when Byrne turned, unsmiling, to the other man.

"That won't do, you know, Stewart," he said, grave but not unfriendly.

"The Kid would n't bite her."

"We 'll not argue about it."

After a second's awkward pause Stewart smiled.

"Certainly not," he agreed cheerfully. "That is up to you, of course. I did n't know. We 're looking for you to-night."

A sudden repulsion for the evening's engagement rose in Byrne, but the situation following his ungraciousness was delicate.

"I 'll be round," he said. "I have a lecture and I may be late, but I'll come."

The "Kid" was not stupid. She moved off into the night, chin in air, angrily flushed.

"You saw!" she choked, when Stewart had overtaken her and slipped a hand through her arm. "He protects her from me! It is because of you. Before I knew you —"

"Before you knew me, little one," he said cheerfully, "you were exactly what you are now."

She paused on the curb and raised her voice.

"So! And what is that?"

"Beautiful as the stars, only — not so remote."

In their curious bi-lingual talk there was little room for subtlety. The "beautiful" calmed her, but the second part of the sentence roused her suspicion.

"Remote? What is that?"

"I was thinking of Worthington."

The name was a signal for war. Stewart repented, but too late.

In the cold evening air, to the amusement of a passing detail of soldiers trundling a bread-wagon by a rope, Stewart stood on the pavement and dodged verbal brickbats of Viennese

idioms and German epithets. He drew his chin into the up-turned collar of his overcoat and waited, an absurdly patient figure, until the hail of consonants had subsided into a rain of tears Then he took the girl's elbow again and led her childishly weeping, into a narrow side street beyond the prying ears and eyes of the Alserstrasse.

Byrne went back to Harmony. The incident of Stewart and the girl was closed and he dismissed it instantly. That situation was not his, or of his making. But here in the coffee-house, lovely, alluring, rather puzzled at this moment, was also a situation. For there was a situation. He had suspected it that morning, listening to the delicatessen-seller's narrative of Rosa's account of the disrupted colony across in the old lodge; he had been certain of it that evening, finding Harmony in the dark entrance to his own rather sordid pension. Now, in the bright light of the coffee-house, surmising her poverty, seeing her beauty, the emotional coming and going of her color, her frank loneliness, and — God save the mark! — her trust in him, he accepted the situation and adopted it: his responsibility, if you please.

He straightened under it. He knew the old city fairly well — enough to love it and to loathe it in one breath. He had seen its tragedies and

passed them by, or had, in his haphazard way, thrown a greeting to them, or even a glass of native wine. And he knew the musical temperament; the all or nothing of its insistent demands; its heights that are higher than others, its wretchednesses that are hell. Once in the Hofstadt Theater, where he had bought standing room, he had seen a girl he had known in Berlin, where he was taking clinics and where she was cooking her own meals. She had been studying singing. In the Hofstadt Theater she had worn a sable coat and had avoided his eyes.

Perhaps the old coffee-house had seen nothing more absurd, in its years of coffee and billiards and Münchener beer, than Peter's new resolution that night: this poverty adopting poverty, this youth adopting youth, with the altruistic purpose of saving it from itself.

And this, mind you, before Peter Byrne had heard Harmony's story or knew her name, Rosa having called her "The Beautiful One" in her narrative, and the delicatessen-seller being literal in his repetition.

Back to "The Beautiful One" went Peter Byrne, and, true to his new part of protector and guardian, squared his shoulders and tried to look much older than he really was, and responsible. The result was a grimness that alarmed Harmony back to the forgotten proprieties.

"I think I must go," she said hurriedly, after a glance at his determinedly altruistic profile. "I must finish packing my things. The Portier has promised —"

"Go! Why, you have n't even told me your name!"

"Frau Schwarz will present you to-night," primly and rising.

Peter Byrne rose, too.

"I am going back with you. You should not go through that lonely yard alone after dark."

"Yard! How do you know that?"

Byrne was picking up the cheese, which he had thoughtlessly set on the heater, and which proved to be in an alarming state of dissolution. It took a moment to rewrap, and incidentally furnished an inspiration. He indicated it airily.

"Saw you this morning coming out — delicatessen shop across the street," he said glibly. And then, in an outburst of honesty which the girl's eyes seemed somehow to compel: "That 's true, but it 's not all the truth. I was on the bus last night, and when you got off alone I — I saw you were an American, and that 's not a good neighborhood. I took the liberty of following you to your gate!"

He need not have been alarmed. Harmony was only grateful, and said so. And in her gratitude she made no objection to his suggestion that

he see her safely to the old lodge and help her carry her hand-luggage and her violin to the pension. He paid the trifling score, and followed by many eyes in the room they went out into the crisp night together.

At the lodge the doors stood wide, and a vigorous sound of scrubbing showed that the Portier's wife was preparing for the inspection of possible new tenants. She was cleaning down the stairs by the light of a candle, and the steam of the hot water on the cold marble invested her like an aura. She stood aside to let them pass, and then went cumbrously down the stairs to where, a fork in one hand and a pipe in the other, the Portier was frying chops for the evening meal.

"What have I said?" she demanded from the doorway. "Your angel is here."

"So!"

"She with whom you sing, old cracked voice! Whose money you refuse, because she reminds you of your opera singer! She is again here, and with a man!"

"It is the way of the young and beautiful — there is always a man," said the Portier, turning a chop.

His wife wiped her steaming hands on her apron and turned away, exasperated.

"It is the same man whom I last night saw

at the gate," she threw back over her shoulder. "I knew it from the first; but you, great booby, can see nothing but red lips. Bah!"

Upstairs in the salon of Maria Theresa, lighted by one candle and freezing cold, in a stiff chair under the great chandelier Peter Byrne sat and waited and blew on his fingers. Down below, in the Street of Seven Stars, the arc lights swung in the wind.

CHAPTER IV

THE supper that evening was even unusually bad. Frau Schwarz, much crimped and clad in frayed black satin, presided at the head of the long table. There were few, almost no Americans, the Americans flocking to good food at reckless prices in more fashionable pensions; to the Frau Gallitzenstein's, for instance, in the Kochgasse, where there was to be had real beefsteak, where turkeys were served at Thanksgiving and Christmas, and where, were one so minded, one might revel in whipped cream.

The Pension Schwarz, however, was not without adornment. In the center of the table was a large bunch of red cotton roses with wire stems and green paper leaves, and over the side-table, with its luxury of compôte in tall glass dishes and its wealth of small hard cakes, there hung a framed motto which said, "Nicht Rauchen," "No Smoking,"— and which looked suspiciously as if it had once adorned a compartment of a railroad train.

Peter Byrne was early in the dining-room. He had made, for him, a careful toilet, which

consisted of a shave and clean linen. But he had gone further: He had discovered, for the first time in the three months of its defection, a button missing from his coat, and had set about to replace it. He had cut a button from another coat, by the easy method of amputating it with a surgical bistoury, and had sewed it in its new position with a curved surgical needle and a few inches of sterilized catgut. The operation was slow and painful, and accomplished only with the aid of two cigarettes and an artery clip. When it was over he tied the ends in a surgeon's knot underneath and stood back to consider the result. It seemed neat enough, but conspicuous. After a moment or two of troubled thought he blacked the white catgut with a dot of ink and went on his way rejoicing.

Peter Byrne was entirely untroubled as to the wisdom of the course he had laid out for himself. He followed no consecutive line of thought as he dressed. When he was not smoking he was whistling, and when he was doing neither, and the needle proved refractory in his cold fingers, he was swearing to himself. For there was no fire in the room. The materials for a fire were there, and a white tile stove, as cozy as an obelisk in a cemetery, stood in the corner. But fires are expensive, and hardly necessary when one sleeps with all one's windows open — one win-

dow, to be exact, the room being very small — and spends most of the day in a warm and comfortable shambles called a hospital.

To tell the truth he was not thinking of Harmony at all, except subconsciously, as instance the button. He was going over, step by step, the technic of an operation he had seen that afternoon, weighing, considering, even criticizing. His conclusion, reached as he brushed back his hair and put away his sewing implements, was somewhat to the effect that he could have done a better piece of work with his eyes shut and his hands tied behind his back; and that if it were not for the wealth of material to work on he 'd pack up and go home. Which brought him back to Harmony and his new responsibility. He took off the necktie he had absently put on and hunted out a better one.

He was late at supper — an offense that brought a scowl from the head of the table, a scowl that he met with a cheerful smile. Harmony was already in her place. Seated between a little Bulgarian and a Jewish student from Galicia, she was almost immediately struggling in a sea of language, into which she struck out now and then tentatively, only to be again submerged. Byrne had bowed to her conventionally, even coldly, aware of the sharp eyes and tongues round the table, but Harmony did not

understand. She had expected moral support from his presence, and failing that she sank back into the loneliness and depression of the day. Her bright color faded; her eyes looked tragic and rather aloof. She ate almost nothing, and left the table before the others had finished.

What curious little dramas of the table are played under unseeing eyes! What small tragedies begin with the soup and end with dessert! What heartaches with a salad! Small tragedies of averted eyes, looking away from appealing ones; lips that tremble with wretchedness nibbling daintily at a morsel; smiles that sear; foolish bits of talk that mean nothing except to one, and to that one everything! Harmony, freezing at Peter's formal bow and gazing obstinately ahead during the rest of the meal, or no nearer Peter than the red-paper roses, and Peter, showering the little Bulgarian next to her with detestable German in the hope of a glance. And over all the odor of cabbage salad, and the "Nicht Rauchen" sign, and an acrimonious discussion on eugenics between an American woman doctor named Gates and a German matron who had had fifteen children, and who reduced every general statement to a personal insult.

Peter followed Harmony as soon as he dared.

Her door was closed, and she was playing very softly, so as to disturb no one. Defiantly, too, had he only known it, her small chin up and her color high again; playing the "Humoresque," of all things, in the hope, of course, that he would hear it and guess from her choice the wild merriment of her mood. Peter rapped once or twice, but obtained no answer, save that the "Humoresque" rose a bit higher; and, Dr. Gates coming along the hall just then, he was forced to light a cigarette to cover his pausing.

Dr. Gates, however, was not suspicious. She was a smallish woman of forty or thereabout, with keen eyes behind glasses and a masculine disregard of clothes, and she paused by Byrne to let him help her into her ulster.

"New girl, eh?" she said, with a birdlike nod toward the door. "Very gay, isn't she, to have just finished a supper like that! Honestly, Peter, what are we going to do?"

"Growl and stay on, as we have for six months. There is better food, but not for our terms."

Dr. Gates sighed, and picking a soft felt hat from the table put it on with a single jerk down over her hair.

"Oh, darn money, anyhow!" she said. "Come and walk to the corner with me. I have a lecture."

Peter promised to follow in a moment, and

hurried back to his room. There, on a page from one of his lecture notebooks, he wrote: —

"Are you ill? Or have I done anything?

"P. B."

This with great care he was pushing under Harmony's door when the little Bulgarian came along and stopped, smiling. He said nothing, nor did Peter, who rose and dusted his knees. The little Bulgarian spoke no English and little German. Between them was the wall of language. But higher than this barrier was the understanding of their common sex. He held out his hand, still smiling, and Peter, grinning sheepishly, took it. Then he followed the woman doctor down the stairs.

To say that Peter Byrne was already in love with Harmony would be absurd. She attracted him, as any beautiful and helpless girl attracts an unattracted man. He was much more concerned, now that he feared he had offended her, than he would have been without this fillip to his interest. But even his concern did not prevent his taking copious and intelligent notes at his lecture that night, or interfere with his enjoyment of the Stein of beer with which, after it was over, he washed down its involved German.

The engagement at Stewart's irked him some-

what. He did not approve of Stewart exactly, not from any dislike of the man, but from a lack of fineness in the man himself — an intangible thing that seems to be a matter of that unfashionable essence, the soul, as against the clay; of the thing contained, by an inverse metonymy, for the container.

Boyer, a nerve man from Texas, met him on the street, and they walked to Stewart's apartment together. The frosty air and the rapid exercise combined to drive away Byrne's irritation; that, and the recollection that it was Saturday night and that to-morrow there would be no clinics, no lectures, no operations; that the great shambles would be closed down and that priests would read mass to convalescents in the chapels. He was whistling as he walked along.

Boyer, a much older man, whose wife had come over with him, stopped under a street light to consult his watch.

"Almost ten!" he said. "I hope you don't mind, Byrne; but I told Jennie I was going to your pension. She detests Stewart."

"Oh, that's all right. She knows you're playing poker?"

"Yes. She doesn't object to poker. It's the other. You can't make a good woman understand that sort of thing."

"Thank God for that!"

After a moment of silence Byrne took up his whistling again. It was the "Humoresque."

Stewart's apartment was on the third floor. Admission at that hour was to be gained only by ringing, and Boyer touched the bell. The lights were still on, however, in the hallways, revealing not overclean stairs and, for a wonder, an electric elevator. This, however, a card announced as out of order. Boyer stopped and examined the card grimly.

" 'Out of order'!" he observed. "Out of order since last spring, judging by that card. Vorwärts!"

They climbed easily, deliberately. At home in God's country Boyer played golf, as became the leading specialist of his county. Byrne, with a driving-arm like the rod of a locomotive, had been obliged to forswear the more expensive game for tennis, with a resulting muscular development that his slight stoop belied. He was as hard as nails, without an ounce of fat, and he climbed the long steep flights with an elasticity that left even Boyer a step or so behind.

Stewart opened the door himself, long German pipe in hand, his coat replaced by a worn smoking-jacket. The little apartment was thick with smoke, and from a room on the right came

the click of chips and the sound of beer mugs on wood.

Marie, restored to good humor, came out to greet them, and both men bowed ceremoniously over her hand, clicking their heels together and bowing from the waist. Byrne sniffed.

"What do I smell, Marie?" he demanded. "Surely not sausages!"

Marie dimpled. It was an old joke, to be greeted as one greets an old friend. It was always sausages.

"Sausages, of a truth — fat ones."

"But surely not with mustard?"

"Ach, ja — englisch mustard."

Stewart and Boyer had gone on ahead. Marie laid a detaining hand on Byrne's arm.

"I was very angry with you to-day."

"With me?"

Like the others who occasionally gathered in Stewart's unconventional ménage, Byrne had adopted Stewart's custom of addressing Marie in English, while she replied in her own tongue.

"Ja. I wished but to see nearer the American Fräulein's hat, and you — She is rich, so?"

"I really don't know. I think not."

"And good?"

"Yes, of course."

Marie was small; she stood, her head back, her eyes narrowed, looking up at Byrne. There

was nothing evil in her face, it was not even hard. Rather, there was a sort of weariness, as of age and experience. She had put on a white dress, cut out at the neck, and above her collar-bones were small, cuplike hollows. She was very thin.

"I was sad to-night," she said plaintively. "I wished to jump out the window."

Byrne was startled, but the girl was smiling at the recollection.

"And I made you feel like that?"

"Not you — the other Fräulein. I was dirt to her. I —" She stopped tragically, then sniffled.

"The sausages!" she cried, and gathering up her skirts ran toward the kitchen. Byrne went on into the sitting-room.

Stewart was a single man spending two years in post-graduate work in Germany and Austria, not so much because the Germans and Austrians could teach what could not be taught at home, but because of the wealth of clinical material. The great European hospitals, filled to overflowing, offered unlimited choice of cases. The contempt for human life of overpopulated cities, coupled with the extreme poverty and helplessness of the masses, combined to form that tragic part of the world which dies that others may live.

Stewart, like Byrne, was doing surgery, and the very lack of fineness which Byrne felt in the man promised something in his work, a sort of ruthlessness, a singleness of purpose, good or bad, an overwhelming egotism that in his profession might only be a necessary self-reliance.

His singleness of purpose had, at the beginning of his residence in Vienna, devoted itself to making him comfortable. With the narrow means at his control he had the choice of two alternatives: To live, as Byrne was living, in a third-class pension, stewing in summer, freezing in winter, starving always; or the alternative he had chosen.

The Stewart apartment had only three rooms, but it possessed that luxury of luxuries, a bath. It was not a bath in the usual sense of water on tap, and shining nickel plate, but a bath for all that, where with premeditation and forethought one might bathe. The room had once been a fuel and store room, but now boasted a tin tub and a stove with a reservoir on top, where water might be heated to the boiling point, at the same time bringing up the atmosphere to a point where the tin tub sizzled if one touched it.

Behind the bathroom a tiny kitchen with a brick stove; next, a bedroom; the whole incredibly neat. Along one side of the wall a

clothespress, which the combined wardrobes of two did not fill. And beyond that again, opening through an arch with a dingy chenille curtain, the sitting-room, now in chaotic disorder.

Byrne went directly to the sitting-room. There were four men already there: Stewart and Boyer, a pathology man named Wallace Hunter, doing research work at the general hospital, and a young piano student from Tennessee named MacLean. The cards had been already dealt, and Byrne stood by waiting for the hand to be played.

The game was a small one, as befitted the means of the majority. It was a regular Saturday night affair, as much a custom as the beer that sat in Steins on the floor beside each man, or as Marie's boiled Wiener sausages.

The blue chips represented a Krone, the white ones five Hellers. MacLean, who was hardly more than a boy, was winning, drawing in chips with quick gestures of his long pianist's fingers.

Byrne sat down and picked up his cards. Stewart was staying out, and so, after a glance, did he. The other three drew cards and fell to betting. Stewart leaned back and filled his long pipe, and after a second's hesitation Byrne turned to him.

"I don't know just what to say, Stewart,"

he began in an undertone. "I 'm sorry. I did n't want to hurt Marie, but — "

"Oh, that's all right." Stewart drew at his pipe and bent forward to watch the game with an air of ending the discussion.

"Not at all. I did hurt her and I want to explain. Marie has been kind to me, and I like her. You know that."

"Don't be an ass!" Stewart turned on him sharply. "Marie is a little fool, that's all. I did n't know it was an American girl."

Byrne played in bad luck. His mind was not on the cards. He stayed out of the last hand, and with a cigarette wandered about the room. He glanced into the tidy bedroom and beyond, to where Marie hovered over the stove.

She turned and saw him.

"Come," she called. "Watch the supper for me while I go down for more beer."

"But no," he replied, imitating her tone. "Watch the supper for me while I go down for more beer."

"I love thee," she called merrily. "Tell the Herr Doktor I love thee. And here is the pitcher."

When he returned the supper was already laid in the little kitchen. The cards were put away, and young MacLean and Wallace Hunter were replacing the cover and the lamp on the

card-table. Stewart was orating from a pinnacle of proprietorship.

"Exactly," he was saying, in reply to something gone before; "I used to come here Saturday nights — used to come early and take a bath. Worthington had rented it furnished for a song. Used to sit in a corner and envy Worthington his bathtub, and that lamp there, and decent food, and a bed that didn't suffer from necrosis in the center. Then when he was called home I took it."

"Girl and all, was n't it?"

"Girl and all. Old Worth said she was straight, and, by Jove, she is. He came back last fall on his wedding trip — he married a wealthy girl and came to see us. I was out, but Marie was here. There was the deuce to pay."

He lowered his voice. The men had gathered about him in a group.

"Jealous, eh?" from Hunter.

"Jealous? No! He tried to kiss her and she hit him — said he did n't respect her!"

"It's a curious code of honor," said Boyer thoughtfully. And indeed to none but Stewart did it seem amusing. This little girl of the streets, driven by God knows what necessity to make her own code and, having made it, living up to it with every fiber of her.

"Bitte zum speisen!" called Marie gayly

from her brick stove, and the men trooped out to the kitchen.

The supper was spread on the table, with the pitcher of beer in the center. There were Swiss cheese and cold ham and rolls, and above all sausages and mustard. Peter drank a great deal of beer, as did the others, and sang German songs with a frightful accent and much vigor and sentiment, as also did the others.

Then he went back to the cold room in the Pension Schwarz, and told himself he was a fool to live alone when one could live like a prince for the same sum properly laid out. He dropped into the hollow center of his bed, where his big figure fitted as comfortably as though it lay in a washtub, and before his eyes there came a vision of Stewart's flat and the slippers by the fire — which was eminently human.

However, a moment later he yawned, and said aloud, with considerable vigor, that he 'd be damned if he would — which was eminently Peter Byrne. Almost immediately, with the bed coverings, augmented by his overcoat, drawn snug to his chin, and the better necktie swinging from the gasjet in the air from the opened window, Peter was asleep. For four hours he had entirely forgotten Harmony.

CHAPTER V

THE peace of a gray Sunday morning hung like a cloud over the little Pension Schwarz. In the kitchen the elderly maid, with a shawl over her shoulders and stiffened fingers, made the fire, while in the dining-room the little chambermaid cut butter and divided it sparingly among a dozen breakfast trays — on each tray two hard rolls, a butter pat, a plate, a cup. On two trays Olga, with a glance over her shoulder, placed two butter pats. The mistress yet slept, but in the kitchen Katrina had a keen eye for butter — and a hard heart.

Katrina came to the door.

"The hot water is ready," she announced. "And the coffee also. Hast thou been to mass?"

"Ja."

"That is a lie." This quite on general principle, it being one of the cook's small tyrannies to exact religious observance from her underling, and one of Olga's Sunday morning's indulgences to oversleep and avoid the mass. Olga took the accusation meekly and without reply, being occupied at that moment in standing between Katrina and the extra pats of butter.

"For the lie," said Katrina calmly, "thou shalt have no butter this morning. There, the Herr Doktor rings for water. Get it, wicked one!"

Katrina turned slowly in the doorway.

"The new Fräulein is American?"

"Ja."

Katrina shrugged her shoulders.

"Then I shall put more water to heat," she said resignedly. "The Americans use much water. God knows it cannot be healthy!"

Olga filled her pitcher from the great copper kettle and stood with it poised in her thin young arms.

"The new Fräulein is very beautiful," she continued aloud. "Thinkest thou it is the hot water?"

"Is an egg more beautiful for being boiled?" demanded Katrina. "Go, and be less foolish. See, it is not the Herr Doktor who rings, but the new American."

Olga carried her pitcher to Harmony's door, and being bidden, entered. The room was frigid and Harmony, at the window in her nightgown, was closing the outer casement. The inner still swung open. Olga, having put down her pitcher, shivered.

"Surely the Fräulein has not slept with open windows?"

"Always with open windows." Harmony having secured the inner casement, was wrapping herself in the blue silk kimono with the faded butterflies. Merely to look at it made Olga shiver afresh. She shook her head.

"But the air of the night," she said, "it is full of mists and illnesses! Will you have breakfast now?"

"In ten minutes, after I have bathed."

Olga having put a match to the stove went back to the kitchen, shaking her head.

"They are strange, the Americans!" she said to Katrina. "And if to be lovely one must bathe daily, and sleep with open windows —"

Harmony had slept soundly after all. Her pique at Byrne had passed with the reading of his note, and the sensation of his protection and nearness had been almost physical. In the virginal little apartment in the lodge of Maria Theresa the only masculine presence had been that of the Portier, carrying up coals at ninety Hellers a bucket, or of the accompanist who each alternate day had played for the Big Soprano to practice. And they had felt no deprivation, except for those occasional times when Scatchy developed a reckless wish to see the interior of a dancing-hall or one of the little theaters that opened after the opera.

But, as calmly as though she had never argued alone with a cabman or disputed the bill at the delicatessen shop, Harmony had thrown herself on the protection of this shabby big American whom she had met but once, and, having done so, slept like a baby. Not, of course, that she realized her dependence. She had felt very old and experienced and exceedingly courageous as she put out her light the night before and took a flying leap into the bed. She was still old and experienced, if a trifle less courageous, that Sunday morning.

Promptly in ten minutes Olga brought the breakfast, two rolls, two pats of butter — shades of the sleeping mistress and Katrina the thrifty — and a cup of coffee. On the tray was a bit of paper torn from a notebook: —

"Part of the prescription is an occasional walk in good company. Will you walk with me this afternoon? I would come in person to ask you, but am spending the morning in my bath-robe, while my one remaining American suit is being pressed.

"P. B."

Harmony got the ink and her pen from her trunk and wrote below: —

"You are very kind to me. Yes, indeed.

"H. W."

When frequent slamming of doors and steps along the passageway told Harmony that the pension was fully awake, she got out her violin. The idea of work obsessed her. To-morrow there would be the hunt for something to do to supplement her resources, this afternoon she had rashly promised to walk. The morning, then, must be given up to work. But after all she did little.

For an hour, perhaps, she practiced. The little Bulgarian paused outside her door and listened, rapt, his eyes closed. Peter Byrne, listening while he sorted lecture memoranda at his little table in bathrobe and slippers, absently filed the little note with the others — where he came across it months later — next to a lecture on McBurney's Point, and spent a sad hour or so over it. Over all the sordid little pension, with its odors of food and stale air, its spotted napery and dusty artificial flowers, the music hovered, and made for the time all things lovely.

In her room across from Harmony's, Anna Gates was sewing, or preparing to sew. Her hair in a knob, her sleeves rolled up, the room in violent disorder, she was bending over the bed, cutting savagely at a roll of pink flannel. Because she was working with curved surgeon's scissors, borrowed from Peter, the cut edges were strangely scalloped. Her method as well

as her tools was unique. Clearly she was intent on a body garment, for now and then she picked up the flannel and held it to her. Having thus, as one may say, got the line of the thing, she proceeded to cut again, jaw tight set, small veins on her forehead swelling, a small replica of Peter Byrne sewing a button on his coat.

After a time it became clear to her that her method was wrong. She rolled up the flannel viciously and flung it into a corner, and proceeded to her Sunday morning occupation of putting away the garments she had worn during the week, a vast and motley collection.

On the irritability of her mood Harmony's music had a late but certain effect. She made a toilet, a trifle less casual than usual, seeing that she put on her stays, and rather sheepishly picked up the bundle from the corner. She hunted about for a thimble, being certain she had brought one from home a year before, but failed to find it. And finally, bundle under her arm and smiling, she knocked at Harmony's door.

"Would you mind letting me sit with you?" she asked. "I'll not stir. I want to sew, and my room is such a mess!"

Harmony threw the door wide. "You will make me very happy, if only my practicing does not disturb you."

Dr. Gates came in and closed the door.

"I 'll probably be the disturbing element," she said. "I 'm a noisy sewer."

Harmony's immaculate room and radiant person put her in good humor immediately. She borrowed a thimble — not because she cared whether she had one or not, but because she knew a thimble was a part of the game — and settled herself in a corner, her ragged pieces in her lap. For an hour she plodded along and Harmony played. Then the girl put down her bow and turned to the corner. The little doctor was jerking at a knot in her thread.

"It 's in the most damnable knot!" she said, and Harmony was suddenly aware that she was crying, and heartily ashamed of it.

"Please don't pay any attention to me," she implored. "I hate to sew. That 's the trouble. Or perhaps it 's not all the trouble. I'm a fool about music."

"Perhaps, if you hate to sew —"

"I hate a good many things, my dear, when you play like that. I hate being over here in this place, and I hate fleas and German cooking and clinics, and I hate being forty years old and as poor as a church-mouse and as ugly as sin, and I hate never having had any children!"

Harmony was very uncomfortable and just a little shocked. But the next moment Dr.

Gates had wiped her eyes with a scrap of the flannel and was smiling up through her glasses.

"The plain truth really is that I have indigestion. I dare say I'm really weeping in anticipation over the Sunday dinner! The food's bad and I can't afford to live anywhere else. I 'd take a room and do my own cooking, but what time have I?" She spread out the pieces of flannel on her knee. "Does this look like anything to you?"

"A petticoat, is n't it?"

"I did n't intend it as a petticoat."

"I thought, on account of the scallops —"

"Scallops!" Dr. Gates gazed at the painfully cut pink edges and from them to Harmony. Then she laughed, peal after peal of joyous mirth.

"Scallops!" she gasped at last. "Oh, my dear, if you 'd seen me cutting 'em! And with Peter Byrne's scissors!"

Now here at last they were on common ground. Harmony, delicately flushed, repeated the name, clung to it conversationally, using little adroitnesses to bring the talk back to him. All roads of talk led to Peter — Peter's future, Peter's poverty, Peter's refusing to have his hair cut, Peter's encounter with a major of the guards, and the duel Peter almost fought. It developed that Peter, as the challenged, had

had the choice of weapons, and had chosen fists, and that the major had been carried away. Dr. Gates grew rather weary of Peter at last and fell back on the pink flannel. She confided to Harmony that the various pieces, united, were to make a dressing-gown for a little American boy at the hospital. "Although," she commented, "it looks more like a chair cover."

Harmony offered to help her, and got out a sewing-box that was lined with a piece of her mother's wedding dress. And as she straightened the crooked edges she told the doctor about the wedding dress, and about the mother who had called her Harmony because of the hope in her heart. And soon, by dint of skillful listening, which is always better than questioning, the faded little woman doctor knew all the story.

She was rather aghast.

"But suppose you cannot find anything to do?"

"I must," simply.

"It's such a terrible city for a girl alone."

"I'm not really alone. I know you now."

"An impoverished spinster! Much help I shall be!"

"And there is Peter Byrne."

"Peter!" Dr. Gates sniffed. "Peter is poorer

than I am, if there is any comparison in destitution!"

Harmony stiffened a trifle.

"Of course I do not mean money," she said. "There are such things as encouragement, and — and friendliness."

"One cannot eat encouragement," retorted Dr. Gates sagely. "And friendliness between you and any man — bah! Even Peter is only human, my dear."

"I am sure he is very good."

"So he is. He is very poor. But you are very attractive. There, I'm a skeptic about men, but you can trust Peter. Only don't fall in love with him. It will be years before he can marry. And don't let him fall in love with you. He probably will."

Whereupon Dr. Gates taking herself and her pink flannel off to prepare for lunch, Harmony sent a formal note to Peter Byrne, regretting that a headache kept her from taking the afternoon walk as she had promised. Also, to avoid meeting him, she did without dinner, and spent the afternoon crying herself into a headache that was real enough.

Anna Gates was no fool. While she made her few preparations for dinner she repented bitterly what she had said to Harmony. It is difficult for the sophistry of forty to remember and cher-

ish the innocence of twenty. For illusions it is apt to substitute facts, the material for the spiritual, the body against the soul. Dr. Gates, from her school of general practice, had come to view life along physiological lines.

With her customary frankness she approached Peter after the meal.

"I've been making mischief, Peter. I have been talking too much, as usual."

"Certainly not about me, Doctor. Out of my blameless life —"

"About you, as a representative member of your sex. I'm a fool."

Peter looked serious. He had put on the newly pressed suit and his best tie, and was looking distinguished and just now rather stern.

"To whom?"

"To the young Wells person. Frankly, Peter, I dare say at this moment she thinks you are everything you should n't be, because I said you were only human. Why it should be evil to be human, or human to be evil —"

"I cannot imagine," said Peter slowly, "the reason for any conversation about me."

"Nor I, when I look back. We seemed to talk about other things, but it always ended with you. Perhaps you were our one subject in common. Then she irritated me by her calm confidence. The world was good, everybody was

good. She would find a safe occupation and all would be well."

"So you warned her against me," said Peter grimly.

"I told her you were human and that she was attractive. Shall I make 'way with myself?"

"*Cui bono?*" demanded Peter, smiling in spite of himself. "The mischief is done."

Dr. Gates looked up at him.

"I'm in love with you myself, Peter!" she said gratefully. "Perhaps it is the tie. Did you ever eat such a meal?"

CHAPTER VI

A VERY pale and dispirited Harmony it was who bathed her eyes in cold water that evening and obeyed little Olga's "Bitte zum speisen." The chairs round the dining-table were only half occupied — a free concert had taken some, Sunday excursions others. The little Bulgarian, secretly considered to be a political spy, was never about on this one evening of the week. Rumor had it that on these evenings, secreted in an attic room far off in the sixteenth district, he wrote and sent off reports of what he had learned during the week — his gleanings from near-by tables in coffee-houses or from the indiscreet hours after midnight in the café, where the Austrian military was wont to gather and drink.

Into the empty chair beside Harmony Peter slid his long figure, and met a tremulous bow and silence. From the head of the table Frau Schwarz was talking volubly — as if, by mere sound, to distract attention from the scantiness of the meal. Under cover of the Babel Peter spoke to the girl. Having had his warning his

tone was friendly, without a hint of the intimacy of the day before.

"Better?"

"Not entirely. Somewhat."

"I wish you had sent Olga to me for some tablets. No one needs to suffer from headache, when five grains or so of powder will help them."

"I am afraid of headache tablets."

"Not when your physician prescribes them, I hope!"

This was the right note. Harmony brightened a little. After all, what had she to do with the man himself? He had constituted himself her physician. That was all.

"The next time I shall send Olga."

"Good!" he responded heartily; and proceeded to make such a meal as he might, talking little, and nursing, by a careful indifference, her new-growing confidence.

It was when he had pushed his plate away and lighted a cigarette — according to the custom of the pension, which accorded the "Nicht Rauchen" sign the same attention that it did to the portrait of the deceased Herr Schwarz — that he turned to her again.

"I am sorry you are not able to walk. It promises a nice night."

Peter was clever. Harmony, expecting an in-

vitation to walk, had nerved herself to a cool refusal. This took her off guard.

"Then you do not prescribe air?"

"That's up to how you feel. If you care to go out and don't mind my going along as a sort of Old Dog Tray I have n't anything else to do."

Dr. Gates, eating stewed fruit across the table, gave Peter a swift glance of admiration, which he caught and acknowledged. He was rather exultant himself; certainly he had been adroit.

"I'd rather like a short walk. It will make me sleep," said Harmony, who had missed the by-play. "And Old Dog Tray would be a very nice companion, I'm sure."

It is doubtful, however, if Anna Gates would have applauded Peter had she followed the two in their rambling walk that night. Direction mattering little and companionship everything, they wandered on, talking of immaterial things — of the rough pavements, of the shop windows, of the gray mediæval buildings. They came to a full stop in front of the Votivkirche, and discussed gravely the twin Gothic spires and the Benk sculptures on the façade. And there in the open square, casting diplomacy to the winds, Peter Byrne turned to Harmony and blurted out what was in his heart.

"Look here," he said, "you don't care a rap about spires. I don't believe you know anything about them. I don't. What did that idiot of a woman doctor say to you to-day?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You do very well. And I 'm going to set you right. She starts out with two premises: I 'm a man, and you 're young and attractive. Then she draws some sort of fool deduction. You know what I mean?"

"I don't see why we need discuss it," said poor Harmony. "Or how you know —"

"I know because she told me. She knew she had been a fool, and she came to me. I don't know whether it makes any difference to you or not, but — we 'd started out so well, and then to have it spoiled! My dear girl, you are beautiful and I know it. That 's all the more reason why, if you 'll stand for it, you need some one to look after you — I 'll not say like a brother, because all the ones I ever knew were darned poor brothers to their sisters, but some one who will keep an eye on you and who is n't going to fall in love with you."

"I did n't think you were falling in love with me; nor did I wish you to."

"Certainly not. Besides, I —" Here Peter Byrne had another inspiration, not so good as the first — "Besides, there is somebody at home,

you understand? That makes it all right, does n't it?"

"A girl at home?"

"A girl," said Peter, lying manfully.

"How very nice!" said Harmony, and put out her hand. Peter, feeling all sorts of a cheat, took it, and got his reward in a complete restoral of their former comradely relations. From abstractions of church towers and street paving they went, with the directness of the young, to themselves. Thereafter, during that memorable walk, they talked blissful personalities, Harmony's future, Peter's career, money — or its lack — their ambitions, their hopes, even — and here was intimacy, indeed! — their disappointments, their failures of courage, their occasional loss of faith in themselves.

The first real snow of the year was falling as they turned back toward the Pension Schwarz, a damp snow that stuck fast and melted with a chilly cold that had in it nothing but depression. The upper spires of the Votivkirche were hidden in a gray mist; the trees in the park took on, against the gloom of the city hall, a snowy luminosity. Save for an occasional pedestrian, making his way home under an umbrella, the streets were deserted. Byrne and Harmony had no umbrella, but the girl rejected his offer of a taxicab.

"We should be home too quickly," she observed naïvely. "And we have so much to say about me. Now I thought that perhaps by giving English lessons in the afternoon and working all morning at my music —"

And so on and on, square after square, with Peter listening gravely, his head bent. And square after square it was borne in on him what a precarious future stretched before this girl beside him, how very slender her resources, how more than dubious the outcome.

Poverty, which had only stimulated Peter Byrne in the past, ate deep into his soul that night.

Epochmaking as the walk had been, seeing that it had reëstablished a friendship and made a working basis for future comradely relations, they were back at the corner of the Alserstrasse before ten. As they turned in at the little street, a man, lurching somewhat, almost collided with Harmony. He was a short, heavy-set person with a carefully curled mustache, and he was singing, not loudly, but with all his maudlin heart in his voice, the barcarolle from the "Tales" of Hoffmann. He saw Harmony, and still singing planted himself in her path. When Byrne would have pushed him aside Harmony caught his arm.

"It is only the Portier from the lodge," she said.

The Portier, having come to rest on a throaty and rather wavering note, stood before Harmony, bowing.

"The Fräulein has gone and I am very sad," he said thickly. "There is no more music, and Rosa has run away with a soldier from Salzburg who has only one lung."

"But think!" Harmony said in German. "No more practicing in the early dawn, no young ladies bringing mud into your new-scrubbed hall! It is better, is it not? All day you may rest and smoke!"

Byrne led Harmony past the drunken Portier, who turned with caution and bowed after them.

"Gute Nacht," he called. "Küss die Hand, Fräulein. Four rooms and the salon and a bath of the finest."

As they went up the Hirschengasse they could hear him pursuing his unsteady way down the street and singing lustily. At the door of the Pension Schwarz Harmony paused.

"Do you mind if I ask one question?"

"You honor me, madam."

"Then — what is the name of the girl back home?"

Peter Byrne was suddenly conscious of a

complete void as to feminine names. He offered, in a sort of panic, the first one he recalled: —

"Emma."

"Emma! What a nice, old-fashioned name!" But there was a touch of disappointment in her voice.

Harmony had a lesson the next day. She was a favorite pupil with the master. Out of so much musical chaff he winnowed only now and then a grain of real ability. And Harmony had that. Scatchy and the Big Soprano had been right — she had the real thing.

The short half-hour lesson had a way with Harmony of lengthening itself to an hour or more, much to the disgust of the lady secretary in the anteroom. On that Monday Harmony had pleased the old man to one of his rare enthusiasms.

"Six months," he said, "and you will go back to your America and show them how over here we teach violin. I will a letter — letters — give you, and you shall put on the programme, of your concerts that you are my pupil, is it not so?"

Harmony was drawing on her worn gloves; her hands trembled a little with the praise and excitement.

"If I can stay so long," she answered unsteadily.

"You must stay. Have I so long labored, and now before it is finished you talk of going! Gott im Himmel!"

"It is a matter of money. My father is dead. And unless I find something to do I shall have to go back."

The master had heard many such statements. They never ceased to rouse his ire against a world that had money for everything but music. He spent five minutes in indignant protest, then: —

"But you are clever and young, child. You will find a way to stay. Perhaps I can now and then find a concert for you." It was a lure he had thrown out before, a hook without a bait. It needed no bait, being always eagerly swallowed. "And no more talk of going away. I refuse to allow. You shall not go."

Harmony paid the lady secretary on her way out. The master was interested. He liked Harmony and he believed in her. But fifty Kronen is fifty Kronen, and South American beef is high of price. He followed Harmony into the outer room and bowed her out of his studio.

"The Fräulein has paid?" he demanded, turning sharply to the lady secretary.

"Always."

"After the lesson?"

"Ja, Herr Professor."

"It is better," said the master, "that she pay hereafter before the lesson."

"Ja, Herr Professor."

Whereupon the lady secretary put a red-ink cross before Harmony's name. There were many such crosses on the ledger.

CHAPTER VII

FOR three days Byrne hardly saw Harmony. He was off early in the morning, hurried back to the midday meal and was gone again the moment it was over. He had lectures in the evenings, too, and although he lingered for an hour or so after supper it was to find Harmony taken possession of by the little Bulgarian, seized with a sudden thirst for things American.

On the evening of the second day he had left Harmony, enmeshed and helpless in a tangle of language, trying to explain to the little Bulgarian the reason American women wished to vote. Byrne flung down the stairs and out into the street, almost colliding with Stewart.

They walked on together, Stewart with the comfortably rolling gait of the man who has just dined well, Byrne with his heavy, rather solid tread. The two men were not congenial, and the frequent intervals without speech between them were rather for lack of understanding than for that completeness of it which often fathers long silences.

Byrne was the first to speak after their greeting.

"Marie all right?"

"Fine. Said if I saw you to ask you to supper some night this week."

"Thanks. Does it matter which night?"

"Any but Thursday. We're hearing 'La Bohème.'"

"Say Friday, then."

Byrne's tone lacked enthusiasm, but Stewart in his after-dinner mood failed to notice it.

"Have you thought any more about our conversation of the other night?"

"What was that?"

Stewart poked him playfully in the ribs.

"Wake up, Byrne!" he said. "You remember well enough. Neither the Days nor any one else is going to have the benefit of your assistance if you go on living the way you have been. I was at Schwarz's. It is the double drain there that tells on one — eating little and being eaten much. Those old walls are full of vermin. Why don't you take our apartment?"

"Yours?"

"Yes, for a couple of months. I'm through with Schleich and Breidau can't take me for two months. It's Marie's off season and we're going to Semmering for the winter sports-

We're ahead enough to take a holiday. And if you want the flat for the same amount you are spending now, or less, you can have it, and — a home, old man."

Byrne was irritated, the more so that he realized that the offer tempted him. To his resentment was added a contempt of himself.

"Thanks," he said. "I think not."

"Oh, all right." Stewart was rather offended. "I can't do more than give you a chance."

They separated shortly after and Byrne went on alone. The snow of Sunday had turned to a fine rain which had lasted all of Monday and Tuesday. The sidewalks were slimy; wagons slid in the ooze of the streets; and the smoke from the little stoves in the street-cars followed them in depressing horizontal clouds. Cabmen sat and smoked in the interior of musty cabs. The women hod-carriers on a new building steamed like horses as they worked.

Byrne walked along, his head thrust down into his up-turned collar; moisture gathered on his face like dew, condensed rather than precipitated. And as he walked there came before him a vision of the little flat on the Kochgasse, with the lamp on the table, and the general air of warmth and cheer, and a figure presiding over the brick stove in the kitchen. Byrne shook himself like a great dog and turned in at

the gate of the hospital. He was thoroughly ashamed of himself.

That week was full of disappointments for Harmony. Wherever she turned she faced a wall of indifference or, what was worse, an interest that frightened her. Like a bird in a cage she beat helplessly against barriers of language, of strange customs, of stolidity that were not far from absolute cruelty.

She held to her determination, however, at first with hope, then, as the pension in advance and the lessons at fifty Kronen — also in advance, — went on, recklessly. She played marvelously those days, crying out through her violin the despair she had sealed her lips against. On Thursday, playing for the master, she turned to find him flourishing his handkerchief, and went home in a sort of daze, incredulous that she could have moved him to tears.

The little Bulgarian was frankly her slave now. He had given up the coffee-houses that he might spend that hour near her, on the chance of seeing her or, failing that, of hearing her play. At night in the Café Hungaria he sat for hours at a time, his elbows on the table, a bottle of native wine before him, and dreamed of her. He was very fat, the little Georgiev, very swarthy, very pathetic. The Balkan kettle was simmering in those days, and he had been set

to watch the fire. But instead he had kindled a flame of his own, and was feeding it with stray words, odd glances, a bit of music, the curve of a woman's hair behind her ears. For reports he wrote verses in modern Greek, and through one of those inadvertences which make tragedy, the Minister of War down in troubled Bulgaria once received between the pages of a report in cipher on the fortifications of the Danube a verse in fervid hexameter that made even that grim official smile.

Harmony was quite unconscious. She went on her way methodically: so many hours of work, so many lessons at fifty Kronen, so many afternoons searching for something to do, making rounds of shops where her English might be valuable.

And after a few weeks Peter Byrne found time to help. After one experience, when Harmony left a shop with flaming face and tears in her eyes, he had thought it best to go with her. The first interview, under Peter's grim eyes, was a failure. The shopkeeper was obviously suspicious of Peter. After that, whenever he could escape from clinics, Peter went along, but stayed outside, smoking his eternal cigarette, and keeping a watchful eye on things inside the shop.

Only once was he needed. At that time, sus-

pecting that all was not well, from the girl's eyes and the leer on the shopkeeper's face, he had opened the door in time to hear enough. He had lifted the proprietor bodily and flung him with a crash into a glass showcase of ornaments for the hair. Then, entirely cheerful and happy, and unmolested by the frightened clerks, he led Harmony outside and in a sort of atavistic triumph bought her a bunch of valley lilies.

Nevertheless, in his sane moments, Peter knew that things were very bad, indeed. He was still not in love with the girl. He analyzed his own feeling very carefully, and that was his conclusion. Nevertheless he did a quixotic thing — which was Peter, of course, all over.

He took supper with Stewart and Marie on Friday, and the idea came to him there. Hardly came to him, being Marie's originally. The little flat was cozy and bright. Marie, having straightened her kitchen, brought in a waist she was making and sat sewing while the two men talked. Their conversation was technical, a new extirpation of the thyroid gland, a recent nephrectomy.

In her curious way Marie liked Peter and respected him. She struggled with the technicalities of their talk as she sewed, finding here and there a comprehensive bit. At those times she

sat, needle poised, intelligent eyes on the speakers, until she lost herself again in the mazes of their English.

At ten o'clock she rose and put away her sewing. Peter saw her get the stone pitcher and knew she was on her way for the evening beer. He took advantage of her absence to broach the matter of Harmony.

"She's up against it, as a matter of fact," he finished. "It ought to be easy enough for her to find something, but it is n't."

"I hardly saw her that day in the coffee-house; but she's rather handsome, is n't she?"

"That's one of the difficulties. Yes."

Stewart smoked and reflected. "No friends here at all?"

"None. There were three girls at first. Two have gone home."

"Could she teach violin?"

"I should think so."

"Are n't there any kids in the American colony who want lessons? There's usually some sort of infant prodigy ready to play at any entertainments of the Doctors' Club."

"They don't want an American teacher, I fancy; but I suppose I could put a card up in the club rooms. Damn it all!" cried Peter with a burst of honest resentment, "why do I have to be poor?"

"If you were rolling in gold you could hardly offer her money, could you?"

Peter had not thought of that before. It was the only comfort he found in his poverty. Marie had brought in the beer and was carefully filling the mugs. "Why do you not marry her?" she asked unexpectedly. "Then you could take this flat. We are going to Semmering for the winter sports. I would show her about the stove."

"Marry her, of course!" said Peter gravely. "Just pick her up and carry her to church! The trifling fact that she does not wish to marry me need have nothing to do with it."

"Ah, but does she not wish it?" demanded Marie. "Are you so certain, stupid big one? Do not women always love you?"

Ridiculous as the thought was, Peter pondered it as he went back to the Pension Schwarz. About himself he was absurdly modest, almost humble. It had never occurred to him that women might care for him for himself. In his struggling life there had been little time for women. But about himself as the solution of a problem — that was different.

He argued the thing over. In the unlikely contingency of the girl's being willing, was Stewart right — could two people live as cheaply as one? Marie was an Austrian and knew how

to manage — that was different. And another thing troubled him. He dreaded to disturb the delicate adjustment of their relationship; the *terra incognita* of a young girl's mind daunted him. There was another consideration which he put resolutely in the back of his mind — his career. He had seen many a promising one killed by early marriage, men driven to the hack work of the profession by the scourge of financial necessity. But that was a matter of the future; the necessity was immediate.

The night was very cold. Gusts of wind from the snow-covered Schneeberg drove along the streets, making each corner a fortress defended by the elements, a battlement to be seized, lost, seized again. Peter Byrne battled valiantly but mechanically. And as he fought he made his decision.

He acted with characteristic promptness. Possibly, too, he was afraid of the strength of his own resolution. By morning sanity might prevail, and in cold daylight he would see the absurdity of his position. He almost ran up the winding staircase. At the top his cold fingers fumbled the key and he swore under his breath. He slammed the door behind him. Peter always slammed doors, and had an apologetic way of opening the door again and closing it gently, as if to show that he could.

Harmony's room was dark, but he had surprised her once into a confession that when she was very downhearted she liked to sit in the dark and be very blue indeed. So he stopped and knocked. There was no reply, but from Dr. Gates's room across there came a hum of conversation. He knew at once that Harmony was there.

Peter hardly hesitated. He took off his soft hat and ran a hand over his hair, and he straightened his tie. These preliminaries to a proposal of marriage being disposed of, he rapped at the door.

Anna Gates opened it. She wore a hideous red-flannel wrapper, and in deference to Harmony a thimble. Her flat breast was stuck with pins, and pinkish threads revealed the fact that the bathrobe was still under way.

"Peter!" she cried. "Come in and get warm."

Harmony, in the blue kimono, gave a little gasp, and flung round her shoulders the mass of pink on which she had been working.

"Please go out!" she said. "I am not dressed."

"You are covered," returned Anna Gates. "That's all that any sort of clothing can do. Don't mind her, Peter, and sit on the bed. Look out for pins!"

Peter, however, did not sit down. He stood just inside the closed door and stared at Har-

mony — Harmony in the red light from the little open door of the stove; Harmony in blue and pink and a bit of white petticoat; Harmony with her hair over her shoulders and tied out of her eyes with an encircling band of rosy flannel.

"Do sit!" cried Anna Gates. "You fill the room so. Bless you, Peter, what a collar!"

No man likes to know his collar is soiled, especially on the eve of proposing marriage to a pink and blue and white vision. Peter, seated now on the bed, writhed.

"I rapped at Miss Wells's door," he said. "You were not there."

This last, of course, to Harmony.

Anna Gates sniffed.

"Naturally!"

"I had something to say to you. I — I dare say it is hardly pension etiquette for you to go over to your room and let me say it there?"

Harmony smiled above the flannel.

"Could you call it through the door?"

"Hardly."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Dr. Gates, rising. "I'll go over, of course, but not for long. There's no fire."

With her hand on the knob, however, Harmony interfered.

"Please!" she implored. "I am not dressed

and I'd rather not." She turned to Peter. "You can say it before her, can't you? She — I have told her all about things."

Peter hesitated. He felt ridiculous for the second time that night. Then: —

"It was merely an idea I had. I saw a little apartment furnished — you could learn to use the stove, unless, of course, you don't like housekeeping — and food is really awfully cheap. Why, at these delicatessen places and bakeshops —"

Here he paused for breath and found Dr. Gates's quizzical glance fixed on him, and Harmony's startled eyes.

"What I am trying to say," he exploded, "is that I believe if you would marry me it would solve some of your troubles anyhow." He was talking for time now, against Harmony's incredulous face. "You'd be taking on others, of course. I'm not much and I'm as poor — well, you know. It — it was the apartment that gave me the idea —"

"And the stove!" said Harmony; and suddenly burst into joyous laughter. After a rather shocked instant Dr. Gates joined her. It was real mirth with Harmony, the first laugh of days, that curious laughter of women that is not far from tears.

Peter sat on the bed uncomfortably. He

grinned sheepishly and made a last feeble attempt to stick to his guns.

"I mean it. You know I'm not in love with you or you with me, of course. But we are such a pair of waifs, and I thought we might get along. Lord knows I need some one to look after me!"

"And Emma?"

"There is no Emma. I made her up."

Harmony sobered at that.

"It is only"— she gasped a little for breath — "it is only your — your transparency, Peter." It was the first time she had called him Peter. "You know how things are with me and you want to help me, and out of your generosity you are willing to take on another burden. Oh, Peter!"

And here, Harmony being an emotional young person, the tears beat the laughter to the surface and had to be wiped away under the cover of mirth.

Anna Gates, having recovered herself, sat back and surveyed them both sternly through her glasses.

"Once for all," she said brusquely, "let such foolishness end. Peter, I am ashamed of you. Marriage is not for you — not yet, not for a dozen years. Any man can saddle himself with a wife; not every man can be what you may be if

you keep your senses and stay single. And the same is true for you, girl. To tide over a bad six months you would sacrifice the very thing you are both struggling for?"

"I 'm sure we don't intend to do it," replied Harmony meekly.

"Not now. Some day you may be tempted. When that time comes, remember what I say. Matrimonially speaking, each of you is fatal to the other. Now go away and let me alone. I'm not accustomed to proposals of marriage."

It was in some confusion of mind that Peter Byrne took himself off to the bedroom with the cold tiled stove and the bed that was as comfortable as a washtub. Undeniably he was relieved. Also Harmony's problem was yet unsolved. Also she had called him Peter.

Also he had said he was not in love with her. Was he so sure of that?

At midnight, just as Peter, rolled in the bedclothing, had managed to warm the cold concavity of his bed and had dozed off, Anna Gates knocked at his door.

"Yes?" said Peter, still comfortably asleep.

"It is Dr. Gates."

"Sorry, Doctor — have to 'xcuse me," mumbled Peter from the blanket.

"Peter!"

Peter roused to a chilled and indignant consciousness and sat up in bed.

"Well?"

"Open the door just a crack."

Resignedly Peter crawled out of bed, carefully turning the coverings up to retain as much heat as possible. An icy blast from the open window blew round him, setting everything movable in the little room to quivering. He fumbled in the dark for his slippers, failed to find them, and yawning noisily went to the door.

Anna Gates, with a candle, was outside. Her short, graying hair was out of its hard knot, and hung in an equally uncompromising six-inch plait down her back. She had no glasses, and over the candle-frame she peered short-sightedly at Peter.

"It's about Jimmy," she said. "I don't know what's got into me, but I've forgotten for three days. It's a good bit more than time for a letter."

"Great Scott!"

"Both yesterday and to-day he asked for it and to-day he fretted a little. The nurse found him crying."

"The poor little devil!" said Peter contritely. "Overdue, is it? I'll fix it to-night."

"Leave it under the door where I can get it in the morning. I'm off at seven."

"The envelope?"

"Here it is. And take my candle. I 'm going to bed."

That was at midnight or shortly after. Half after one struck from the twin clocks of the Votivkirche and echoed from the Stephansplatz across the city. It found Peter with the window closed, sitting up in bed, a candle balanced on one knee, a writing-tablet on the other.

He was writing a spirited narrative of a chamois hunt in which he had taken part that day, including a detailed description of the quarry, which weighed, according to Peter, two hundred and fifty pounds, Peter being strong on imagination and short on facts as regards the Alpine chamois. Then, trying to read the letter from a small boy's point of view and deciding that it lacked snap, he added by way of postscript a harrowing incident of avalanche, rope, guide, and ice axe. He ended in a sort of glow of authorship, and after some thought took fifty pounds off the chamois.

The letter finished, he put it in a much-used envelope addressed to Jimmy Conroy — an envelope that stamped the whole episode as authentic, bearing as it did an undecipherable date and the postmark of a tiny village in the Austrian Tyrol.

It was almost two when Peter put out the candle and settled himself to sleep.

It was just two o'clock when the night nurse, making rounds in her ward in the general hospital, found a small boy very much awake on his pillow, and taking off her felt slipper shook it at him in pretended fury.

"Now, thou bad one!" she said. "Awake, when the Herr Doktor orders sleep! Shall I use the slipper?"

The boy replied in German with a strong English accent.

"I cannot sleep. Yesterday the Fräulein Elisabet said that in the mountains there are accidents, and that sometimes —"

"The Fräulein Elisabet is a great fool. To-morrow comes thy letter of a certainty. The post has been delayed with great snows. Thy father has perhaps captured a great boar, or a — a chamois, and he writes of it."

"Do chamois have horns?"

"Ja. Great horns — so."

"He will send them to me! And there are no accidents?"

"None. Now sleep, or — the slipper."

CHAPTER VIII

SO far Harmony's small world in the old city had consisted of Scatchy and the Big Soprano, Peter, and Anna Gates, with far off in the firmament the master. Scatchy and the Big Soprano had gone, weeping anxious postcards from every way station it is true, but nevertheless gone. Peter and Anna Gates remained, and the master as long as her funds held out. To them now she was about to add Jimmy.

The bathrobe was finished. Out of the little doctor's chaos of pink flannel Harmony had brought order. The result, masculine and complete even to its tassels and cord of pink yarn, was ready to be presented. It was with mingled emotions that Anna Gates wrapped it up and gave it to Harmony the next morning.

"He has n't been so well the last day or two," she said. "He does n't sleep much — that 's the worst of those heart conditions. Sometimes, while I've been working on this thing, I've wondered — Well, we're making a fight anyhow. And better take the letter, too, Harry. I might forget and make lecture notes on it, and if I spoil that envelope —"

Harmony had arranged to carry the bathrobe to the hospital, meeting the doctor there after her early clinic. She knew Jimmy's little story quite well. Anna Gates had told it to her in detail.

"Just one of the tragedies of the world, my dear," she had finished. "You think you have a tragedy, but you have youth and hope; I think I have my own little tragedy, because I have to go through the rest of life alone, when taken in time I'd have been a good wife and mother. Still I have my work. But this little chap, brought over here by a father who hoped to see him cured, and spent all he had to bring him here, and then — died. It gets me by the throat."

"And the boy does not know?" Harmony had asked, her eyes wide.

"No, thanks to Peter. He thinks his father is still in the mountains. When we heard about it Peter went up and saw that he was buried. It took about all the money there was. He wrote home about it, too, to the place they came from. There has never been any reply. Then ever since Peter has written these letters. Jimmy lives for them."

Peter! It was always Peter. Peter did this. Peter said that. Peter thought thus. A very large part of Harmony's life was Peter in those days.

She was thinking of him as she waited at the

gate of the hospital for Anna Gates, thinking of his shabby gray suit and unkempt hair, of his letter that she carried to Jimmy Conroy, of his quixotic proposal of the night before. Of the proposal, most of all — it was so eminently characteristic of Peter, from the conception of the plan to its execution. Harmony's thought of Peter was very tender that morning as she stood in the arched gateway out of reach of the wind from the Schneeberg. The tenderness and the bright color brought by the wind made her very beautiful. Little Marie, waiting across the Alserstrasse for a bus, and stamping from one foot to the other to keep warm, recognized and admired her. After all, the American women were chic, she decided, although some of the doctors had wives of a dowdiness —Himmel! And she could copy the Fräulein's hat for two Kronen and a bit of ribbon she possessed.

The presentation of the bathrobe was a success. Six nurses and a Dozent with a red beard stood about and watched Jimmy put into it, and the Dozent, who had been engaged for five years and could not marry because the hospital board forbade it, made a speech for Jimmy in awe-inspiring German, ending up with a poem that was intended to be funny, but that made the nurses cry. From which it will be seen that Jimmy was a great favorite.

During the ceremony, for such it was, the Germans loving a ceremony, Jimmy kept his eyes on the letter in Anna Gates's hand and waited. That the letter had come was enough. He lay back in anticipatory joy, and let himself be talked over, and bathrobed, and his hair parted Austrian fashion and turned up over a finger, which is very Austrian indeed. He liked Harmony. The girl caught his eyes on her more than once. He interrupted the speech once to ask her just what part of the robe she had made, and whether she had made the tassel. When she admitted the tassel, his admiration became mixed with respect.

It was a bright day, for a marvel. Sunlight came through the barred window behind Jimmy's bed, and brought into dazzling radiance the pink bathrobe, and Harmony's eyes, and fat Nurse Elisabet's white apron. It lay on the bedspread in great squares, outlined by the shadows of the window bars. Now and then the sentry, pacing outside, would advance as far as Jimmy's window, and a warlike silhouette of military cap and the upper end of a carbine would appear on the coverlet. These events, however, were rare, the sentry preferring the shelter of the gateway and the odor of boiling onions from the lodge just inside.

The Dozent retired to his room for the second

breakfast; the nurses went about the business of the ward; Dr. Anna Gates drew a hairpin from her hair and made a great show of opening the many times opened envelope.

"The letter at last!" she said. "Shall I read it or will you?"

"You read it. It takes me so long. I'll read it all day, after you are gone. I always do."

Anna Gates read the letter. She read aloud poor Peter's first halting lines, when he was struggling against sleep and cold. They were mainly an apology for the delay. Then forgetting discomfort in the joy of creation, he became more comfortable. The account of the near-accident was wonderfully graphic; the description of the chamois was fervid, if not accurate. But consternation came with the end.

The letter apparently finished, there was yet another sheet. The doctor read on.

"For Heaven's sake," said Peter's frantic postscript, "find out how much a medium-sized chamois —"

Dr. Gates stopped "— ought to weigh," was the rest of it, "and fix it right in the letter. The kid's too smart to be fooled and I never saw a chamois outside of a drug store. They have horns, have n't they?"

"That's funny!" said Jimmy Conroy.

"That was one of my papers slipped in by

mistake," remarked Dr. Gates, with dignity, and flashing a wild appeal for help to Harmony.

"How did one of your papers get in when it was sealed?"

"I think," observed Harmony, leaning forward, "that little boys must not ask too many questions, especially when Christmas is only six weeks off."

"I know! He wants to send me the horns the way he sent me the boar's tusks."

For Peter, having in one letter unwisely recorded the slaughter of a boar, had been obliged to ransack Vienna for a pair of tusks. The tusks had not been so difficult. But horns!

Jimmy was contented with his solution and asked no more questions. The morning's excitement had tired him, and he lay back. Dr. Gates went to hold a whispered consultation with the nurse, and came back, looking grave.

The boy was asleep, holding the letter in his thin hands.

The visit to the hospital was a good thing for Harmony — to find some one worse off than she was, to satisfy that eternal desire of women to do something, however small, for some one else. Her own troubles looked very small to her that day as she left the hospital and stepped out into the bright sunshine.

She passed the impassive sentry, then turned and went back to him.

"Do you wish to do a very kind thing?" she asked in German.

Now the conversation of an Austrian sentry consists of yea, yea, and nay, nay, and not always that. But Harmony was lovely and the sun was moderating the wind. The sentry looked round; no one was near.

"What do you wish?"

"Inside that third window is a small boy and he is very ill. I do not think — perhaps he will never be well again. Could you not, now and then, pass the window? It pleases him."

"Pass the window! But why?"

"In America we see few of our soldiers. He likes to see you and the gun."

"Ah, the gun!" He smiled and nodded in comprehension, then, as an officer appeared in the door of a coffee-house across the street, he stiffened into immobility and stared past Harmony into space. But the girl knew he would do as she had desired.

That day brought good luck to Harmony. The wife of one of the professors at the hospital desired English conversation at two Kronen an hour.

Peter brought the news home at noon, and that afternoon Harmony was engaged. It was

little enough, but it was something. It did much more than offer her two Kronen an hour; it gave her back her self-confidence, although the immediate result was rather tragic.

The Frau Professor Bergmeister, infatuated with English and with Harmony, engaged her and took her first two Kronen worth that afternoon. It was the day for a music-lesson. Harmony arrived five minutes late, panting, hat awry, and so full of the Frau Professor Bergmeister that she could think of nothing else.

Obedient to orders she had placed the envelope containing her fifty Kronen before the secretary as she went in. The master was out of humor. Should he, the teacher of the great Koert, be kept waiting for a chit of a girl — only, of course, he said "das Kindchen" or some other German equivalent for chit — and then have her come into the sacred presence breathless, and salute him between gasps as the Frau Professor Bergmeister?

Being excited and now confused by her error, and being also rather tremulous with three flights of stairs at top speed, Harmony dropped her bow. In point of heinousness this classes with dropping one's infant child from an upper window, or sitting on the wrong side of a carriage when with a lady.

The master, thus thrice outraged, rose slowly

and glared at Harmony. Then with a lordly gesture to her to follow he stalked to the outer room, and picking up the envelope with the fifty Kronen held it out to her without a word.

Harmony's world came crashing about her ears. She stared stupidly at the envelope in her hand, at the master's retreating back.

Two girl students waiting their turn, envelopes in hand, giggled together. Harmony saw them and flushed scarlet. But the lady secretary touched her arm.

"It does not matter, Fräulein. He does so sometimes. Always he is sorry. You will come for your next lesson, not so? and all will be well. You are his well-beloved pupil. To-night he will not eat for grief that he has hurt you."

The ring of sincerity in the shabby secretary's voice was unmistakable. Her tense throat relaxed. She looked across at the two students who had laughed. They were not laughing now. Something of fellowship and understanding passed between them in the glance. After all, it was in the day's work — would come to one of them next, perhaps. And they had much in common — the struggle, their faith, the everlasting loneliness, the little white envelopes, each with its fifty Kronen.

Vaguely comforted, but with the light gone out of her day of days, Harmony went down

the three long flights and out into the brightness of the winter day.

On the Ring she almost ran into Peter. He was striding toward her, giving a definite impression of being bound for some particular destination and of being behind time. That this was not the case was shown by the celerity with which, when he saw Harmony, he turned about and walked with her.

"I had an hour or two," he explained, "and I thought I 'd walk. But walking is a social habit, like drinking. I hate to walk alone. How about the Frau Professor?"

"She has taken me on. I'm very happy. But, Dr. Byrne —"

"You called me Peter last night."

"That was different. You had just proposed to me."

"Oh, if that's all that's necessary —" He stopped in the center of the busy Ring with every evident intention of proposing again.

"Please, Peter!"

"Aha! Victory! Well, what about the Frau Professor Bergmeister?"

"She asks so many questions about America; and I cannot answer them."

"For instance?"

"Well, taxes now. She's very much interested in taxes."

"Never owned anything taxable except a dog — and that was n't a tax anyhow; it was a license. Can't you switch her on to medicine or surgery, where I'd be of some use?"

"She says to-morrow we'll talk of the tariff and customs duties."

"Well, I've got something to say on that." He pulled from his overcoat pocket a largish bundle — Peter always bulged with packages — and held it out for her to see. "Tell the Frau Professor Bergmeister with my compliments," he said, "that because some idiot at home sent me five pounds of tobacco, hearing from afar my groans over the tobacco here, I have passed from mere financial stress to destitution. The Austrian customs have taken from me to-day the equivalent of ten dollars in duty. I offered them the tobacco on bended knee, but they scorned it."

"Really, Peter?"

"Really."

Under this lightness Harmony sensed the real anxiety. Ten dollars was fifty Kronen, and fifty Kronen was a great deal of money. She reached over and patted his arm.

"You'll make it up in some way. Can't you cut off some little extravagance?"

"I might cut down on my tailor bills." He

looked down at himself whimsically. "Or on ties. I'm positively reckless about ties!"

They walked on in silence. A detachment of soldiery, busy with that eternal military activity that seems to get nowhere, passed on a dog-trot. Peter looked at them critically.

"Bosnians," he observed. "Raw, half-fed troops from Bosnia, nine out of ten of them tubercular. It's a rotten game, this military play of Europe. How's Jimmy?"

"We left him very happy with your letter."

Peter flushed. "I expect it was pretty poor stuff," he apologized. "I've never seen the Alps except from a train window, and as for a chamois — "

"He says his father will surely send him the horns."

Peter groaned.

"Of course!" he said. "Why, in Heaven's name, did n't I make it an eagle? One can always buy a feather or two. But horns? He really liked the letter?"

"He adored it. He went to sleep almost at once with it in his hands."

Peter glowed. The small irritation of the custom-house forgotten, he talked of Jimmy; of what had been done and might still be done, if only there were money; and from Jimmy he talked boy. He had had a boys' club at

home during his short experience in general practice. Boys were his hobby.

"Scum of the earth, most of them," he said, his plain face glowing. "Dirty little beggars off the street. At first they stole my tobacco, and one of them pawned a medical book or two! Then they got to playing the game right. By Jove, Harmony, I wish you could have seen them! Used to line 'em up and make 'em spell, and the two best spellers were allowed to fight it out with gloves — my own method, and it worked. Spell! They'd spell their heads off to get a chance at the gloves. Gee, how I hated to give them up!"

This was a new Peter, a boyish individual Harmony had never met before. For the first time it struck her that Peter was young. He had always seemed rather old, solid and dependable, the fault of his elder brother attitude to her, no doubt. She was suddenly rather shy, a bit aloof. Peter felt the change and thought she was bored. He talked of other things.

A surprise was waiting for them in the cold lower hallway of the Pension Schwarz. A trunk was there, locked and roped, and on the trunk, in ulster and hat, sat Dr. Gates. Olga, looking rather frightened, was coming down with a traveling-bag. She put down the bag and scuttled up the staircase like a scared rabbit.

The little doctor was grim. She eyed Peter and Harmony with an impersonal hostility, referable to her humor.

"I've been waiting for you two," she flung at them. "I've had a terrific row upstairs and I'm going. That woman's a devil!"

It had been a bad day for Harmony, and this new development, after everything else, assumed the proportions of a crisis. She had clung, at first out of sheer loneliness and recently out of affection, to the sharp little doctor with her mannish affectations, her soft and womanly heart.

"Sit down, child." Anna Gates moved over on the trunk. "You are fagged out. Peter, will you stop looking murderous and listen to me? How much did it cost the three of us to live in this abode of virtue?"

It was simple addition. The total was rather appalling.

"I thought so. Now this is my plan. It may not be conventional, but it will be respectable enough to satisfy anybody. And it will be cheaper, I'm sure of that: We are all going out to the hunting-lodge of Maria Theresa, and Harmony shall keep house for us!"

CHAPTER IX

IT was the middle of November when Anna Gates, sitting on her trunk in the cold entrance hall on the Hirschengasse, flung the conversational bomb that left empty three rooms in the Pension Schwarz.

Mid-December found Harmony back and fully established in the lodge of Maria Theresa on the Street of Seven Stars — back, but with a difference. True, the gate still swung back and forward on rusty hinges, obedient to every whim of the December gales; but the casement windows in the salon no longer creaked or admitted drafts, thanks to Peter and a roll of rubber weather-casing. The grand piano, which had been Scatchy's rented extravagance, had gone never to return, and in its corner stood a battered but still usable upright. Under the great chandelier sat a table with an oil lamp, and evening and morning the white-tiled stove gleamed warm with fire. On the table by the lamp were the combined medical books of Peter and Anna Gates, and an ash-tray which also they used in common.

Shabby still, of course, bare, almost denuded.

the salon of Maria Theresa. But at night, with the lamp lighted and the little door of the stove open, and perhaps, when the dishes from supper had been washed, with Harmony playing softly, it took resolution on Peter's part to put on his overcoat and face a lecture on the resection of a rib or a discussion of the function of the pituitary body.

The new arrangement had proved itself in more ways than one not only greater in comfort but in economy. Food was amazingly cheap. Coal, which had cost ninety Hellers a bucket at the Pension Schwarz, they bought in quantity and could afford to use lavishly. Oil for the lamp was a trifle. They dined on venison now and then, when the shop across boasted a deer from the mountains. They had other game occasionally, when Peter, carrying home a mysterious package, would make them guess what it might contain. Always on such occasions Harmony guessed rabbits. She knew how to cook rabbits, and some of the other game worried her.

For Harmony was the cook. It had taken many arguments and much coaxing to make Peter see it that way. In vain Harmony argued the extravagance of Rosa, now married to the soldier from Salzburg with one lung, or the tendency of the delicatessen seller to weigh

short if one did not watch him. Peter was firm.

It was Dr. Gates, after all, who found the solution.

"Don't be too obstinate, Peter," she admonished him. "The child needs occupation; she can't practice all day. You and I can keep up the financial end well enough, reduced as it is. Let her keep house to her heart's content. That can be her contribution to the general fund."

And that eventually was the way it settled itself, not without demur from Harmony, who feared her part was too small, and who irritated Anna almost to a frenzy by cleaning the apartment from end to end to make certain of her usefulness.

A curious little household surely, one that made the wife of the Portier shake her head, and speak much beneath her breath with the wife of the brushmaker about the Americans having queer ways and not as the Austrians.

The short month had seen a change in all of them. Peter showed it least of all, perhaps. Men feel physical discomfort less keenly than women, and Peter had been only subconsciously wretched. He had gained a pound or two in flesh, perhaps, and he was unmistakably tidier. Anna Gates was growing round and rosy, and

Harmony had trimmed her a hat. But the real change was in Harmony herself.

The girl had become a woman. Who knows the curious psychology by which such changes come — not in a month or a year; but in an hour, a breath. One moment Harmony was a shy, tender young creature, all emotion, quivering at a word, aloof at a glance, prone to occasional introspection and mysterious day-dreams; the next she was a young woman, tender but not shyly so, incredibly poised, almost formidably dignified on occasion, but with little girlish lapses into frolic and high spirits.

The transition moment with Harmony came about in this wise: They had been settled for three weeks. The odor of stewing cabbages at the Pension Schwarz had retired into the oblivion of lost scents, to be recalled, along with its accompanying memory of discomfort, with every odor of stewing cabbages for years to come. At the hospital Jimmy had had a bad week again. It had been an anxious time for all of them. In vain the sentry had stopped outside the third window and smiled and nodded through it; in vain — when the street was deserted and there was none to notice — he went through a bit of the manual of arms on the pavement outside, ending by setting his gun down with a martial and ringing clang.

In vain had Peter exhausted himself in literary efforts, climbing unheard-of peaks, taking walking-tours through such a Switzerland as never was, shooting animals of various sorts, but all hornless, as he carefully emphasized.

And now Jimmy was better again. He was propped up in bed, and with the aid of Nurse Elisabet he had cut out a paper sentry and set it in the barred window. The real sentry had been very much astonished; he had almost fallen over backward. On recovering he went entirely through the manual of arms, and was almost seen by an Oberst-lieutenant. It was all most exciting.

Harmony had been to see Jimmy on the day in question. She had taken him some gelatin, not without apprehension, it being her first essay in jelly and Jimmy being frank with the candor of childhood. The jelly had been a great success.

It was when she was about to go that Jimmy broached a matter very near his heart.

"The horns have n't come, have they?" he asked wistfully.

"No, not yet."

"Do you think he got my letter about them?"

"He answered it, did n't he?"

Jimmy drew a long breath. "It's very funny. He's mostly so quick. If I had the horns, Sister

Elisabet would tie them there at the foot of the bed. And I could pretend I was hunting."

Harmony had a great piece of luck that day. As she went home she saw hanging in front of the wild-game shop next to the delicatessen store a fresh deer, and this time it was a stag Like the others it hung head down, and as i swayed on its hook its great antlers tappec against the shop door as if mutely begging admission.

She could not buy the antlers. In vain she pleaded, explained, implored. Harmony enlisted the Portier, and took him across with her. The wild-game seller was obdurate. He would sell the deer entire, or he would mount head and antlers for his wife's cousin in Galicia as a Christmas gift.

Harmony went back to the lodge and climbed the stairs. She was profoundly depressed. Even the discovery that Peter had come home early and was building a fire in the kitchen brought only a fleeting smile. Anna was not yet home.

Peter built the fire. The winter dusk was falling and Harmony made a movement to light the candles. Peter stopped her.

"Can't we have the firelight for a little while? You are always beautiful, but — you are lovely in the firelight, Harmony."

"That is because you like me. We always think our friends are beautiful."

"I am fond of Anna, but I have never thought her beautiful."

The kitchen was small. Harmony, rolling up her sleeves by the table, and Peter before the stove were very close together. The dusk was fast fading into darkness; to this tiny room at the back of the old house few street sounds penetrated. Round them, shutting them off together from the world of shops with lighted windows, rumbling busses and hurrying humanity, lay the old lodge with its dingy gardens, its whitewashed halls, its dark and twisting staircases.

Peter had been very careful. He had cultivated a comradely manner with the girl that had kept her entirely at her ease with him. But it had been growing increasingly hard. He was only human after all. And he was very comfortable. Love, healthy human love, thrives on physical ease. Indigestion is a greater foe to it than poverty. Great love songs are written, not by poets starving in hall bedrooms, with insistent hunger gnawing and undermining all that is of the spirit, but by full-fed gentlemen who sing out of an overflowing of content and wide fellowship, and who write, no doubt, just after

dinner. Love, being a hunger, does not thrive on hunger.

Thus Peter. He had never found women essential, being occupied in the struggle for other essentials. Women had had little part in his busy life. Once or twice he had seen visions, dreamed dreams, to waken himself savagely to the fact that not for many years could he afford the luxury of tender eyes looking up into his, of soft arms about his neck. So he had kept away from women with almost ferocious determination. And now!

He drew a chair before the stove and sat down. Standing or sitting, he was much too large for the kitchen. He sat in the chair, with his hands hanging, fingers interlaced between his knees.

The firelight glowed over his strong, rather irregular features. Harmony, knife poised over the evening's potatoes, looked at him.

"I think you are sad to-night, Peter."

"Depressed a bit. That's all."

"It is n't money again?"

It was generally money with any of the three, and only the week before Peter had found an error in his bank balance which meant that he was a hundred Kronen or so poorer than he had thought. This discovery had been very upsetting.

"Not more than usual. Don't mind me.

I'll probably end in a roaring bad temper and smash something. My moody spells often break up that way!"

Harmony put down the paring-knife, and going over to where he sat rested a hand on his shoulder. Peter drew away from it.

"I have hurt you in some way?"

"Of course not."

"Could — could you talk about whatever it is? That helps sometimes."

"You would n't understand."

"You have n't quarreled with Anna?" Harmony asked, real concern in her voice.

"No. Good Lord, Harmony, don't ask me what 's wrong! I don't know myself."

He got up almost violently and set the little chair back against the wall. Hurt and astonished, Harmony went back to the table. The kitchen was entirely dark, save for the firelight, which gleamed on the bare floor and the red legs of the table. She was fumbling with a match and the candle when she realized that Peter was just behind her, very close.

"Dearest," he said huskily. The next moment he had caught her to him, was kissing her lips, her hair.

Harmony's heart beat wildly. There was no use struggling against him. The gates of his

self-control were down: all his loneliness, his starved senses rushed forth in tardy assertion.

After a moment Peter kissed her eyelids very gently and let her go. Harmony was trembling, but with shock and alarm only. The storm that had torn him root and branch from his firm ground of self-restraint left her only shaken. He was still very close to her; she could hear him breathing. He did not attempt to speak. With every atom of strength that was left in him he was fighting a mad desire to take her in his arms again and keep her there.

That was the moment when Harmony became a woman.

She lighted the candle with the match she still held. Then she turned and faced him.

"That sort of thing is not for you and me, Peter," she said quietly.

"Why not?"

"There is n't any question about it."

He was still reckless, even argumentative; the crying need of her still obsessed him.

"Why not? Why should I not take you in my arms? If there is a moment of happiness to be had in this grind of work and loneliness —"

"It has not made me happy."

Perhaps nothing else she could have said would have been so effectual. Love demands reciprocation; he could read no passion in her

voice. He knew then that he had left her unstirred. He dropped his outstretched arms.

"I'm sorry. I did n't mean to do it."

"I would rather not talk about it, please."

The banging of a door far off told them that Anna Gates had arrived and was taking off her goloshes in the entry. Peter drew a long breath, and, after his habit, shook himself.

"Very well, we'll not talk of it. But, for Heaven's sake, Harmony, don't avoid me. I'm not a cad. I'll let you alone."

There was only time for a glance of understanding between them, of promise from Peter, of acceptance from the girl. When Anna Gates entered the kitchen she found Harmony peeling potatoes and Peter filling up an already overfed stove.

That night, during that darkest hour before the dawn when the thrifty city fathers of the old town had shut off the street lights because two hours later the sun would rise and furnish light that cost the taxpayers nothing, the Portier's wife awakened.

The room was very silent, too silent. On those rare occasions when the Portier's wife awakened in the night and heard the twin clocks of the Votivkirche strike three, and listened, perhaps, while the delicatessen seller

ambled home from the Schubert Society, singing beerily as he ambled, she was wont to hear from the bed beside hers the rhythmic respiration that told her how safe from Schubert Societies and such like evils was her lord. There was no sound at all.

The Portier's wife raised herself on her elbow and reached over. Owing to the width of the table that stood between the beds and to a sweeping that day which had left the beds far apart she met nothing but empty air. Words had small effect on the Portier, who slept fathoms deep in unconsciousness. Also she did not wish to get up — the floor was cold and a wind blowing. Could she not hear it and the creaking of the deer across the street, as it swung on its hook?

The wife of the Portier was a person of resource. She took the iron candlestick from the table and flung it into the darkness at the Portier's pillow. No startled yell followed.

Suspicion thus confirmed, the Portier's wife forgot the cold floor and the wind, and barefoot felt her way into the hall.

Suspicion was doubly confirmed. The chain was off the door; it even stood open an inch or two.

Armed with a second candlestick she stationed herself inside the door and waited.

The stone floor was icy, but the fury of a woman scorned kept her warm. The Votivkirche struck one, two, three quarters of an hour. The candlestick in her hand changed from iron to ice, from ice to red-hot fire. Still the Portier had not come back and the door chain swung in the wind.

At four o'clock she retired to the bedroom again. Indignation had changed to fear, coupled with sneezing. Surely even the Schubert Society — What was that?

From the Portier's bed was coming a rhythmic respiration!

She roused him, standing over him with the iron candlestick, now lighted, and gazing at him with eyes in which alarm struggled with suspicion.

"Thou hast been out of thy bed!"

"But no!"

"An hour since the bed was empty."

"Thou dreamest."

"The chain is off the door."

"Let it remain so and sleep. What have we to steal or the Americans above? Sleep and keep peace."

He yawned and was instantly asleep again. The Portier's wife crawled into her bed and warmed her aching feet under the crimson feather comfort. But her soul was shaken.

The Devil had been known to come at night and take innocent ones out to do his evil. The innocent ones knew it not, but it might be told by the soles of the feet, which were always soiled.

At dawn the Portier's wife cautiously uncovered the soles of her sleeping lord's feet, and fell back gasping. They were quite black, as of one who had tramped in garden mould.

Early the next morning Harmony, after a restless night, opened the door from the salon of Maria Theresa into the hall and set out a pitcher for the milk.

On the floor, just outside, lay the antlers from the deer across the street. Tied to them was a bit of paper, and on it was written the one word, "Still!"

CHAPTER X

IN looking back after a catastrophe it is easy to trace the steps by which the inevitable advanced. Destiny marches, not by great leaps but with a thousand small and painful steps, and here and there it leaves its mark, a footprint on a naked soul. We trace a life by its scars, as a tree by its rings.

Anna Gates was not the best possible companion for Harmony, and this with every allowance for her real kindliness, her genuine affection for the girl. Life had destroyed her illusions, and it was of illusions that Harmony's veil had been woven. To Anna Gates, worn with a thousand sleepless nights, a thousand thankless days, withered before her time with the struggling routine of medical practice, sapped with endless calls for sympathy and aid, existence ceased to be spiritual and became physiological.

Life and birth and death had lost their mysteries. The veil was rent.

To fit this existence of hers she had built herself a curious creed, a philosophy of individualism, from behind which she flung

strange bombshells of theories, shafts of distorted moralities, personal liberties, irresponsibilities, a supreme scorn for modern law and the prophets. Nature, she claimed, was her law and her prophet.

In her hard-working, virginal life her theories had wrought no mischief. Temptation had been lacking to exploit them, and even in the event of the opportunity it was doubtful whether she would have had the strength of her convictions. Men love theories, but seldom have the courage of them, and Anna Gates was largely masculine. Women, being literal, are apt to absorb dangerous doctrine and put it to the test. When it is false doctrine they discover it too late.

Harmony was now a woman.

Anna would have cut off her hand sooner than have brought the girl to harm; but she loved to generalize. It amused her to see Harmony's eyes widen with horror at one of her radical beliefs. Nothing pleased her more than to pit her individualism against the girl's rigid and conventional morality, and down her by some apparently unanswerable argument.

On the day after the incident in the kitchen such an argument took place — hardly an argument, for Harmony knew nothing of mental fencing. Anna had taken a heavy cold, and

remained at home. Harmony had been practicing, and at the end she played a little winter song by some modern composer. It breathed all the purity of a white winter's day; it was as chaste as ice and as cold; and yet throughout was the thought of green things hiding beneath the snow and the hope of spring.

Harmony, having finished, voiced some such feeling. She was rather ashamed of her thought.

"It seems that way to me," she finished apologetically. "It sounds rather silly. I always think I can tell the sort of person who composes certain things."

"And this gentleman who writes of winter?"

"I think he is very reserved. And that he has never loved any one."

"Indeed!"

"When there is any love in music, any heart, one always feels it, exactly as in books — the difference between a love story and — and —"

"— a dictionary!"

"You always laugh," Harmony complained.

"That 's better than weeping. When I think of the rotten way things go in this world I want to weep always."

"I don't find it a bad world. Of course there are bad people, but there are good ones."

"Where? Peter and you and I, I suppose."

"There are plenty of good men."

"What do you call a good man?"

Harmony hesitated, then went on bravely: —

"Honorable men."

Anna smiled. "My dear child," she said, "you substitute the code of a gentleman for the Mosaic Law. Of course your good man is a monogamist?"

Harmony nodded, puzzled eyes on Anna.

"Then there are no 'good' people in the polygamous countries, I suppose! When there were twelve women to every man, a man took a dozen wives. To-day in our part of the globe there is one woman — and a fifth over — for every man. Each man gets one woman, and for every five couples there is a derelict like myself, mateless."

Anna's amazing frankness about herself often confused Harmony. Her resentment at her single condition, because it left her childless, brought forth theories that shocked and alarmed the girl. In the atmosphere in which Harmony had been reared single women were always presumed to be thus by choice and to regard with a certain tolerance those weaker sisters who had married. Anna, on the contrary, was frankly a derelict, frankly regretted her maiden condition and railed with bitterness against her enforced childlessness. The near approach of Christmas had for years found her morose and resentful.

There are, here and there, such women, essentially mothers but not necessarily wives, their sole passion that of maternity.

Anna, argumentative and reckless, talked on. She tore away, in her resentment, every theory of existence the girl had ever known, and offered her instead an incredible liberty in the name of the freedom of the individual. Harmony found all her foundations of living shaken, and though refusing to accept Anna's theories, found her faith in her own weakened. She sat back, pale and silent, listening, while Anna built up out of her discontent a new heaven and a new earth, with liberty written high in its firmament.

When her reckless mood had passed Anna was regretful enough at the girl's stricken face.

"I 'm a fool!" she said contritely. "If Peter had been here he 'd have throttled me. I deserve it. I 'm a theorist, pure and simple, and theorists are the anarchists of society. There 's only one comfort about us — we never live up to our convictions. Now forget all this rot I 've been talking."

Peter brought up the mail that afternoon, a Christmas card or two for Anna, depressingly early, and a letter from the Big Soprano for Harmony from New York. The Big Soprano

was very glad to be back and spent two pages over her chances for concert work.

". . . I could have done as well had I stayed at home. If I had had the money they wanted, to go to Geneva and sing 'Brunnhilde,' it would have helped a lot. I could have said I'd sung in opera in Europe and at least have had a hearing at the Met. But I did n't, and I'm back at the church again and glad to get my old salary. If it's at all possible, stay until the master has presented you in a concert. He's quite right, you have n't a chance unless he does. And now I'll quit grumbling.

"Scatchy met her Henry at the dock and looked quite lovely, flushed with excitement and having been up since dawn curling her hair. He was rather a disappointment — small and blond, with light blue eyes, and almost dapper. But oh, my dear, I would n't care how pale a man's eyes were if he looked at me the way Henry looked at her.

"They asked me to luncheon with them, but I knew they wanted to be alone together, and so I ate a bite or two, all I could swallow for the lump in my throat, by myself. I was homesick enough in old Wien, but I am just as homesick now that I am here, for we are really

homesick only for people, not places. And no one really cared whether I came back or not."

Peter had been miserable all day, not with regret for the day before, but with fear. What if Harmony should decide that the situation was unpleasant and decide to leave? What if a reckless impulse, recklessly carried out, were to break up an arrangement that had made a green oasis of happiness and content for all of them in the desert of their common despair?

If he had only let her go and apologized! But no, he had had to argue, to justify himself, to make an idiot of himself generally. He almost groaned aloud as he opened the gate and crossed the wintry garden.

He need not have feared. Harmony had taken him entirely at his word. "I am not a beast. I 'll let you alone," he had said. She had had a bad night, as nights go. She had gone through the painful introspection which, in a thoroughly good girl, always follows such an outburst as Peter's. Had she said or done anything to make him think — Surely she had not! Had she been wrong about Peter after all? Surely not again.

While the Portier's wife, waked, as may happen, by an unaccustomed silence, was standing guard in the hall below, iron candlestick in hand,

Harmony, having read the Litany through in the not particularly religious hope of getting to sleep, was dreaming placidly. It was Peter who tossed and turned almost all night. Truly there had been little sleep that night in the old hunting-lodge of Maria Theresa.

Peter, still not quite at ease, that evening kept out of the kitchen while supper was preparing. Anna, radical theories forgotten and wearing a knitted shawl against drafts, was making a salad, and Harmony, all anxiety and flushed with heat, was broiling a steak.

Steak was an extravagance, to be cooked with clear hot coals and prayer.

"Peter," she called, "you may set the table. And try to lay the cloth straight."

Peter, exiled in the salon, came joyously. Obviously the wretched business of yesterday was forgiven. He came to the door, pipe in mouth.

"Suppose I refuse?" he questioned. "You — you have n't been very friendly with me to-day, Harry."

"I?"

"Don't quarrel, you children," cried Anna, beating eggs vigorously. "Harmony is always friendly, too friendly. The Portier loves her."

"I 'm sure I said good-evening to you."

"You usually say, 'Good-evening, Peter.'"

"And I did not?"

"You did not."

"Then — Good-evening, Peter."

"Thank you."

His steady eyes met hers. In them there was a renewal of his yesterday's promise, abasement, regret. Harmony met him with forgiveness and restoration.

"Sometimes," said Peter humbly, "when I am in very great favor, you say, 'Good-evening, Peter, dear.'"

"Good-evening, Peter, dear," said Harmony.

CHAPTER XI

THE affairs of young Stewart and Marie Jedlicka were not moving smoothly. Having rented their apartment to the Boyers, and through Marie's frugality and the extra month's wages at Christmas, which was Marie's annual perquisite, being temporarily in funds the sky seemed clear enough, and Walter Stewart started on his holiday with a comfortable sense of financial security.

Mrs. Boyer, shown over the flat by Stewart during Marie's temporary exile in the apartment across the hall, was captivated by the comfort of the little suite and by its order. Her housewifely mind, restless with long inactivity in a pension, seized on the bright pans of Marie's kitchen and the promise of the brick-and-sheetiron stove. She disapproved of Stewart, having heard strange stories of him, but there was nothing bacchanal or suspicious about this orderly establishment. Mrs. Boyer was a placid, motherly looking woman, torn from her church and her card club, her grown children, her household gods of thirty years' accumula-

tion, that "Frank" might catch up with his profession.

She had explained it rather tremulously at home.

"Father wants to go," she said. "You children are big enough now to be left. He's always wanted to do it, but we could n't go while you were little."

"But, mother!" expostulated the oldest girl. "When you are so afraid of the ocean! And a year!"

"What is to be will be," she had replied. "If I 'm going to be drowned I 'll be drowned, whether it's in the sea or in a bathtub. And I'll not let father go alone."

Fatalism being their mother's last argument and always final, the children gave up. They let her go. More, they prepared for her so elaborate a wardrobe that the poor soul had had no excuse to purchase anything abroad. She had gone through Paris looking straight ahead lest her eyes lead her into the temptation of the shops. In Vienna she wore her home-town outfit with determination, vaguely conscious that the women about her had more style, were different. She priced unsuitable garments wistfully, and went home to her trunks full of best materials that would never wear out. The children, knowing her, had bought the best.

To this couple, then, Stewart had rented his apartment. It is hard to say by what psychology he found their respectability so satisfactory. It was as though his own status gained by it. He had much the same feeling about the order and decency with which Marie managed the apartment, as if irregularity were thus regularized.

Marie had met him once for a walk along the Graben. She had worn an experimental touch of rouge under a veil, and fine lines were drawn under her blue eyes, darkening them. She had looked very pretty, rather frightened. Stewart had sent her home and had sulked for an entire evening.

So curious a thing is the mind masculine, such an order of disorder, so conventional its defiance of convention. Stewart breaking the law and trying to keep the letter!

On the day they left for Semmering Marie was up at dawn. There was much to do. The house must be left clean and shining. There must be no feminine gewgaws to reveal to the Frau Doktor that it was not a purely masculine establishment. At the last moment, so late that it sent her heart into her mouth, she happened on the box of rouge hidden from Stewart's watchful eyes. She gave it to the milk girl.

Finally she folded her meager wardrobe and

placed it in the Herr Doktor's American trunk: a marvel, that trunk, so firm, so heavy, bound with iron. And with her own clothing she packed Stewart's, the dress-suit he had worn once to the Embassy, a hat that folded, strange American shoes, and books — always books. The Herr Doktor would study at Semmering. When all was in readiness and Stewart was taking a final survey, Marie ran downstairs and summoned a cab. It did not occur to her to ask him to do it. Marie's small life was one of service, and besides there was an element in their relationship that no one but Marie suspected, and that she hid even from herself. She was very much in love with this indifferent American, this captious temporary god of her domestic altar. Such a contingency had never occurred to Stewart; but Peter, smoking gravely in the little apartment, had more than once caught a look in Marie's eyes as she turned them on the other man, and had surmised it. It made him uncomfortable.

When the train was well under way, however, and he found no disturbing element among the three others in the compartment, Stewart relaxed. Semmering was a favorite resort with the American colony, but not until later in the winter. In December there were rains in the mountains, and low-lying clouds that invested

some of the chalets in constant fog. It was not until the middle of January that the little mountain train became crowded with tourists, knickerbockered men with knapsacks, and jaunty feathers in their soft hats, boys carrying ski, women with Alpine cloaks and iron-pointed sticks.

Marie was childishly happy. It was the first real vacation of her life, and more than that she was going to Semmering, in the very shadow of the Raxalpe, the beloved mountain of the Viennese.

Marie had seen the Rax all her life, as it towered thirty miles or so away above the plain. On peaceful Sundays, having climbed the cog railroad, she had seen its white head turn rosy in the setting sun, and once when a German tourist from Munich had handed her his field-glass she had even made out some of the crosses that showed where travelers had met their deaths. Now she would be very close. If the weather were good, she might even say a prayer in the chapel on its crest for the souls of those who had died. It was of a marvel, truly; so far may one go when one has money and leisure.

The small single-trucked railway carriages bumped and rattled up the mountain sides, always rising, always winding. There were moments when the track held to the cliffs only

by gigantic fingers of steel, while far below were peaceful valleys and pink-and-blue houses and churches with gilded spires. There were vistas of snow-peak and avalanche shed, and always there were tunnels. Marie, so wise in some things, was a child in others; she slid close to Stewart in the darkness and touched him for comfort.

"It is so dark," she apologized, "and it frightens me, the mountain heart. In your America, have you so great mountains?"

Stewart patted her hand, a patronizing touch that sent her blood racing.

"Much larger," he said magnificently. "I have n't seen a hill in Europe I'd exchange for the Rockies. And when we cross the mountains there we use railway coaches. These toy railroads are a joke. At home we'd use 'em as street-cars."

"Really! I should like to see America."

"So should I."

The conversation was taking a dangerous trend. Mention of America was apt to put the Herr Doktor in a bad humor or to depress him, which was even worse. Marie, her hand still on his arm and not repulsed, became silent.

At a small way station the three Germans in the compartment left the train. Stewart, lowering a window, bought from a boy on the platform beer and sausages and a bag of pretzels.

As the train resumed its clanking progress they ate luncheon, drinking the beer from the bottles and slicing the sausage with a penknife. It was a joyous trip, a red-letter day in the girl's rather sordid if not uneventful life. The Herr Doktor was pleased with her. He liked her hat, and when she flushed with pleasure demanded proof that she was not rouged. Proof was forthcoming. She rubbed her cheeks vigorously with a handkerchief and produced in triumph its unreddened purity.

"Thou suspicious one!" she pouted. "I must take off the skin to assure thee! When the Herr Doktor says no rouge, I use none."

"You're a good child." He stooped over and kissed one scarlet cheek and then being very comfortable and the beer having made him drowsy, he put his head in her lap and slept.

When he awakened they were still higher. The snow-peak towered above and the valleys were dizzying! Semmering was getting near. They were frequently in darkness; and between the tunnels were long lines of granite avalanche sheds. The little passage of the car was full of tourists looking down.

"We are very close, I am sure," an American girl was saying just outside the doorway. "See, is n't that the Kurhaus? There, it is lost again."

The tourists in the passage were Americans and the girl who had spoken was young and attractive. Stewart noticed them for the first time and moved to a more decorous distance from Marie.

Marie Jedlicka took her cue and lapsed into silence, but her thoughts were busy. Perhaps this girl was going to Semmering also and the Herr Doktor would meet her. But that was foolish! There were other resorts besides Semmering, and in the little villa to which they went there would be no Americans. It was childish to worry about a girl whose back and profile only she had seen. Also profiles were deceptive; there was the matter of the ears. Marie's ears were small and set close to her head. If the American Fräulein's ears stuck out or her face were only short and wide! But no. The American Fräulein turned and glanced once swiftly into the compartment. She was quite lovely.

Stewart thought so, too. He got up with a great show of stretching and yawning and lounged into the passage. He did not speak to the girl; Marie noted that with some comfort. But shortly after she saw him conversing easily with a male member of the party. Her heart sank again. Life was moving very fast for Marie Jedlicka that afternoon on the train.

Stewart was duly presented to the party

of Americans and offered his own cards, bowing from the waist and clicking his heels together, a German custom he had picked up. The girl was impressed; Marie saw that. When they drew into the station at Semmering Stewart helped the American party off first and then came back for Marie. Less keen eyes than the little Austrian's would have seen his nervous anxiety to escape attention, once they were out of the train and moving toward the gate of the station. He stopped to light a cigarette, he put down the hand-luggage and picked it up again, as though it weighed heavily, whereas it was both small and light. He loitered through the gate and paused to exchange a word with the gateman.

The result was, of course, that the Americans were in a sleigh and well up the mountainside before Stewart and Marie were seated side by side in a straw-lined sledge, their luggage about them, a robe over their knees, and a noisy driver high above them on the driving-seat. Stewart spoke to her then, the first time for half an hour.

Marie found some comfort. The villas at Semmering were scattered wide over the mountain breast, set in dense clumps of evergreens, hidden from the roads and from each other by trees and shrubbery separated by valleys. One might live in one part of Semmering for a month

and never suspect the existence of other parts, or wander over steep roads and paths for days and never pass twice over the same one. The Herr Doktor might not see the American girl again — and if he did! Did he not see American girls wherever he went?

The sleigh climbed on. It seemed they would never stop climbing. Below in the valley twilight already reigned, a twilight of blue shadows, of cows with bells wandering home over frosty fields, of houses with dark faces that opened an eye of lamplight as one looked.

Across the valley and far above — Marie pointed without words. Her small heart was very full. Greater than she had ever dreamed it, steeper, more beautiful, more deadly, and crowned with its sunset hue of rose was the Rax. Even Stewart lost his look of irritation as he gazed with her. He reached over and covered both her hands with his large one under the robe.

The sleigh climbed steadily. Marie Jedlicka, in a sort of ecstasy, leaned back and watched the mountain; its crown faded from rose to gold, from gold to purple with a thread of black. There was a shadow on the side that looked like a cross. Marie stopped the sleigh at a wayside shrine, and getting out knelt to say a prayer for the travelers who had died on the Rax.

They had taken a room at a small villa where board was cheap, and where the guests were usually Germans of the thriftier sort from Bavaria. Both the season and the modest character of the establishment promised them quiet and seclusion.

To Marie the house seemed the epitome of elegance, even luxury. It clung to a steep hillside. Their room, on the third floor, looked out from the back of the building over the valley, which fell away almost sheer from beneath their windows. A tiny balcony outside, with access to it by a door from the bedroom, looked far down on the tops of tall pines. It made Marie dizzy.

She was cheerful again and busy. The American trunk was to be unpacked and the Herr Doktor's things put away, his shoes in rows, as he liked them, and his shaving materials laid out on the washstand. Then there was a new dress to put on, that she might do him credit at supper.

Stewart's bad humor had returned. He complained of the room and the draft under the balcony door; the light was wrong for shaving. But the truth came out at last and found Marie not unprepared.

"The fact is," he said, "I 'm not going to eat with you to-night, dear. I 'm going to the hotel."

"With the Americans?"

"Yes. I know a chap who went to college with the brother — with the young man you saw."

Marie glanced down at her gala toilet. Then she began slowly to take off the dress, reaching behind her for a hook he had just fastened and fighting back tears as she struggled with it.

"Now, remember, Marie, I will have no sulking."

"I am not sulking."

"Why should you change your clothes?"

"Because the dress was for you. If you are not here I do not wish to wear it."

Stewart went out in a bad humor, which left him before he had walked for five minutes in the clear mountain air. At the hotel he found the party waiting for him, the women in evening gowns. The girl, whose name was Anita, was bewitching in pale green.

That was a memorable night for Walter Stewart, with his own kind once more — a perfect dinner, brisk and clever conversation, enlivened by a bit of sweet champagne, an hour or two on the terrace afterward with the women in furs, and stars making a jeweled crown for the Rax.

He entirely forgot Marie until he returned to the villa and opening the door of the room found her missing.

She had not gone far. At the sound of his steps she moved on the balcony and came in slowly. She was pale and pinched with cold, but she was wise with the wisdom of her kind. She smiled.

"Didst thou have a fine evening?"

"Wonderful!"

"I am sorry if I was unpleasant. I was tired, now I am rested."

"Good, little Marie!"

CHAPTER XII

THE card in the American Doctors' Club brought a response finally. It was just in time. Harmony's funds were low, and the Frau Professor Bergmeister had gone to St. Moritz for the winter. She regretted the English lessons, but there were always English at St. Moritz and it cost nothing to talk with them. Before she left she made Harmony a present. "For Christmas," she explained. It was a glass pin-tray, decorated beneath with labels from the Herr Professor's cigars and in the center a picture of the Emperor.

The response came in this wise. Harmony struggling home against an east wind and holding the pin-tray and her violin case, opened the old garden gate by the simple expedient of leaning against it. It flew back violently, almost overthrowing a stout woman in process of egress down the walk. The stout woman was Mrs. Boyer, clad as usual in the best broadcloth and wearing her old sable cape, made over according to her oldest daughter's ideas into a staid stole and muff. The muff lay on the path now and Mrs. Boyer was gasping for breath.

"I'm so sorry!" Harmony exclaimed. "It was stupid of me; but the wind — Is this your muff?"

Mrs. Boyer took the muff coldly. From its depths she proceeded to extract a handkerchief and with the handkerchief she brushed down the broadcloth. Harmony stood apologetically by. It is explanatory of Mrs. Boyer's face, attitude, and costume that the girl addressed her in English.

"I backed in," she explained. "So few people come, and no Americans."

Mrs. Boyer, having finished her brushing and responded to this humble apology in her own tongue, condescended to look at Harmony.

"It really is no matter," she said, still coolly but with indications of thawing. "I am only glad it did not strike my nose. I dare say it would have, but I was looking up to see if it were going to snow." Here she saw the violin case and became almost affable.

"There was a card in the Doctors' Club, and I called — " She hesitated.

"I am Miss Wells. The card is mine."

"One of the women here has a small boy who wishes to take violin lessons and I offered to come. The mother is very busy."

"I see. Will you come in? I can make you a cup of tea and we can talk about it."

Mrs. Boyer was very willing, although she had doubts about the tea. She had had no good tea since she had left England, and was inclined to suspect all of it.

They went in together, Harmony chatting gayly as she ran ahead, explaining this bit of the old staircase, that walled-up door, here an ancient bit of furniture not considered worthy of salvage, there a closed and locked room, home of ghosts and legends. To Harmony this elderly woman, climbing slowly behind her, was a bit of home. There had been many such in her life; women no longer young, friends of her mother's who were friends of hers; women to whom she had been wont to pay the courtesy of a potted hyacinth at Easter or a wreath at Christmas or a bit of custard during an illness. She had missed them all cruelly, as she had missed many things — her mother, her church, her small gayeties. She had thought at first that Frau Professor Bergmeister might allay her longing for these comfortable, middle-aged, placid-eyed friends of hers. But the Frau Professor Bergmeister had proved to be a frivolous and garrulous old woman, who substituted ease for comfort, and who burned a candle on the name-day of her first husband while her second was safely out of the house.

So it was with something of excitement that

Harmony led the way up the stairs and into the salon of Maria Theresa.

Peter was there. He was sitting with his back to the door, busily engaged in polishing the horns of the deer. Whatever scruples Harmony had had about the horns, Peter had none whatever, save to get them safely out of the place and to the hospital. So Peter was polishing the horns. Harmony had not expected to find him home, and paused, rather startled.

"Oh, I did n't know you were home."

Peter spoke without turning.

"Try to bear up under it," he said. "I 'm home and hungry, sweetheart!"

"Peter, please!"

Peter turned at that and rose instantly. It was rather dark in the salon and he did not immediately recognize Mrs. Boyer. But that keen-eyed lady had known him before he turned, had taken in the domesticity of the scene and Peter's part in it, and had drawn the swift conclusion of the pure of heart.

"I'll come again," she said hurriedly. "I — I must really get home. Dr. Boyer will be there, and wondering —"

"Mrs. Boyer!" Peter knew her.

"Oh, Dr. Byrne, is n't it? How unexpected to find you here!"

"I live here."

"So I surmised."

"Three of us," said Peter. "You know Anna Gates, don't you?"

"I'm afraid not. Really I —"

Peter was determined to explain. His very eagerness was almost damning.

"She and Miss Wells are keeping house here and have kindly taken me in as a boarder. Please sit down."

Harmony found nothing strange in the situation and was frankly puzzled at Peter. The fact that there was anything unusual in two single women and one unmarried man, unrelated and comparative strangers, setting up housekeeping together had never occurred to her. Many a single woman whom she knew at home took a gentleman into the house as a roomer, and thereafter referred to him as "he" and spent hours airing the curtains of smoke and even, as "he" became a member of the family, in sewing on his buttons. There was nothing indecorous about such an arrangement; merely a concession to economic pressure.

She made tea, taking off her jacket and gloves to do it, but bustling about cheerfully, with her hat rather awry and her cheeks flushed with excitement and hope. Just now, when the Frau Professor had gone, the prospect of a music pupil meant everything. An American child,

too! Fond as Harmony was of children, the sedate and dignified youngsters who walked the parks daily with a governess, or sat with folded hands and fixed eyes through hours of heavy music at the opera, rather daunted her. They were never alone, those Austrian children — always under surveillance, always restrained, always prepared to kiss the hand of whatever relative might be near and to take themselves off to anywhere so it were somewhere else.

"I am so glad you are going to talk to me about an American child," said Harmony, bringing in the tea.

But Mrs. Boyer was not so sure she was going to talk about the American child. She was not sure of anything, except that the household looked most irregular, and that Peter Byrne was trying to cover a difficult situation with much conversation. He was almost glib, was Peter. The tea was good; that was one thing.

She sat back with her muff on her knee, having refused the concession of putting it on a chair as savoring too much of acceptance if not approval, and sipped her tea out of a spoon as becomes a tea-lover. Peter, who loathed tea, lounged about the room, clearly in the way, but fearful to leave Harmony alone with her. She was quite likely, at the first opportunity, to read her a lesson on the conventions, if

nothing worse; to upset the delicate balance of the little household he was guarding. So he stayed, praying for Anna to come and bear out his story, while Harmony toyed with her spoon and waited for some mention of the lessons. None came. Mrs. Boyer, having finished her tea, rose and put down her cup.

"That was very refreshing," she said. "Where shall I find the street-car? I walked out, but it is late."

"I 'll take you to the car." Peter picked up his old hat.

"Thank you. I am always lost in this wretched town. I give the conductors double tips to put me down where I want to go; but how can they when it is the wrong car?" She bowed to Harmony without shaking hands. "Thank you for the tea. It was really good. Where do you get it?"

"There is a tea-shop a door or two from the Grand Hotel."

"I must remember that. Thank you again. Good-bye."

Not a word about the lessons or the American child!

"You said something about my card in the Doctors' Club —"

Something wistful in the girl's eyes caught and held Mrs. Boyer.

After all she was the mother of daughters. She held out her hand and her voice was not so hard.

"That will have to wait until another time. I have made a social visit and we'll not spoil it with business."

"But —"

"I really think the boy's mother must attend to that herself. But I shall tell her where to find you, and" — here she glanced at Peter — "all about it."

"Thank you," said Harmony gratefully.

Peter had no finesse. He escorted Mrs. Boyer across the yard and through the gate with hardly a word. With the gate closed behind them he turned and faced her: —

"You are going away with a wrong impression, Mrs. Boyer."

Mrs. Boyer had been thinking hard as she crossed the yard. The result was a resolution to give Peter a piece of her mind. She drew her ample proportions into a dignity that was almost majesty.

"Yes?"

"I — I can understand why you think as you do. It is quite without foundation."

"I am glad of that." There was no conviction in her voice.

"Of course," went on Peter, humbling him-

self for Harmony's sake, "I suppose it has been rather unconventional, but Dr. Gates is not a young woman by any means, and she takes very good care of Miss Wells. There were reasons why this seemed the best thing to do. Miss Wells was alone and —"

"There is a Dr. Gates?"

"Of course. If you will come back and wait she'll be along very soon."

Mrs. Boyer was convinced and defrauded in one breath; convinced that there might be a Dr. Gates, but equally convinced that the situation was anomalous and certainly suspicious; defrauded in that she had lost the anticipated pleasure of giving Peter a piece of her mind. She walked along beside him without speaking until they reached the street-car line. Then she turned.

"You called her — you spoke to her very affectionately, young man," she accused him.

Peter smiled. The car was close. Some imp of recklessness, some perversion of humor seized him.

"My dear Mrs. Boyer," he said, "that was in jest purely. Besides, I did not know that you were there!"

Mrs. Boyer was a literal person without humor. It was outraged American womanhood incarnate that got into the street-car and

settled its broadcloth of the best quality indignantly on the cane seat. It was outraged American womanhood that flung open the door of Marie Jedlicka's flat, and stalking into Marie Jedlicka's sitting room confronted her husband as he read a month-old newspaper from home.

"Did you ever hear of a woman doctor named Gates?" she demanded.

Boyer was not unaccustomed to such verbal attacks. He had learned to meet domestic broadsides with a shield of impenetrable good humor, or at the most with a return fire of mild sarcasm.

"I never hear of a woman doctor if it can be avoided."

"Dr. Gates — Anna Gates?"

"There are a number here. I meet them in the hospital, but I don't know their names."

"Where does Peter Byrne live?"

"In a pension, I believe, my dear. Are we going to have anything to eat or do we sup of Peter Byrne?"

Mrs. Boyer made no immediate reply. She repaired to the bedroom of Marie Jedlicka, and placed her hat, coat and furs on one of the beds with the crocheted coverlets. It is a curious thing about rooms. There was no change in the bedroom apparent to the eye, save that for Marie's tiny slippers at the foot of the wardrobe

there were Mrs. Boyer's substantial house shoes. But in some indefinable way the room had changed. About it hung an atmosphere of solid respectability, of impeccable purity that soothed Mrs. Boyer's ruffled virtue into peace. Is it any wonder that there is a theory to the effect that things take on the essential qualities of people who use them, and that we are haunted by things, not people? That when grandfather's wraith is seen in his old armchair it is the chair that produces it, while grandfather himself serenely haunts the shades of some vast wilderness of departed spirits?

Not that Mrs. Boyer troubled herself about such things. She was exceedingly orthodox, even in the matter of a hereafter, where the most orthodox are apt to stretch a point, finding no attraction whatever in the thing they are asked to believe. Mrs. Boyer, who would have regarded it as heterodox to substitute any other instrument for the harp of her expectation, tied on her gingham apron before Marie Jedlicka's mirror, and thought of Harmony and of the girls at home.

She told her husband over the supper-table and found him less shocked than she had expected.

"It 's not your affair or mine," he said. "It 's Byrne's business."

"Think of the girl!"

"Even if you are right it 's rather late, is n't it?"

"You could tell him what you think of him."

Dr. Boyer sighed over a cup of very excellent coffee. Much living with a representative male had never taught his wife the reserves among members of the sex masculine.

"I might, but I don't intend to," he said. "And if you listen to me you'll keep the thing to yourself."

"I 'll take precious good care that the girl gets no pupils," snapped Mrs. Boyer. And she did with great thoroughness.

We trace a life by its scars. Destiny, marching on by a thousand painful steps, had left its usual mark, a footprint on a naked soul. The soul was Harmony's; the foot — was it not encased at that moment in Mrs. Boyer's comfortable house shoes?

Anna was very late that night. Peter, having put Mrs. Boyer on her car, went back quickly. He had come out without his overcoat, and with the sunset a bitter wind had risen, but he was too indignant to be cold. He ran up the staircase, hearing on all sides the creaking and banging with which the old house resented a gale, and burst into the salon of Maria Theresa.

Harmony was sitting sidewise in a chair by the tea-table with her face hidden against its worn red velvet. She did not look up when he entered. Peter went over and put a hand on her shoulder. She quivered under it and he took it away.

"Crying?"

"A little," very smothered. "Just dis — disappointment. Don't mind me, Peter."

"You mean about the pupil?"

Harmony sat up and looked at him. She still wore her hat, now more than ever askew, and some of the dye from the velvet had stained her cheek. She looked rather hectic, very lovely.

"Why did she change so when she saw you?"

Peter hesitated. Afterward he thought of a dozen things he might have said, safe things. Not one came to him.

"She — she is an evil-thinking old woman, Harry," he said gravely.

"She did not approve of the way we are living here, is that it?"

"Yes."

"But Anna?"

"She did not believe there was an Anna. Not that it matters," he added hastily. "I'll make Anna go to her and explain. It's her infernal jumping to a conclusion that makes me crazy."

"She will talk, Peter. I am frightened."

"I'll take Anna to-night and we'll go to Boyer's. I'll make that woman get down on her knees to you. I'll —"

"You'll make bad very much worse," said Harmony dejectedly. "When a thing has to be explained it does no good to explain it."

The salon was growing dark. Peter was very close to her again. As in the dusky kitchen only a few days before, he felt the compelling influence of her nearness. He wanted, as he had never wanted anything in his life before, to take her in his arms, to hold her close and bid defiance to evil tongues. He was afraid of himself. To gain a moment he put a chair between them and stood, strong hands gripping its back, looking down at her.

"There is one thing we could do."

"What, Peter?"

"We could marry. If you cared for me even a little it — it might not be so bad for you."

"But I am not in love with you. I care for you, of course, but — not that way, Peter. And I do not wish to marry."

"Not even if I wish it very much?"

"No."

"If you are thinking of my future —"

"I'm thinking for both of us. And although just now you think you care a little for me, you

do not care enough, Peter. You are lonely and I am the only person you see much, so you think you want to marry me. You don't really. You want to help me."

Few motives are unmixed. Poor Peter, thus accused, could not deny his altruism.

And in the face of his poverty and the little he could offer, compared with what she must lose, he did not urge what was the compelling motive after all, his need of her.

"It would be a rotten match for you," he agreed. "I only thought, perhaps — You are right, of course; you ought not to marry."

"And what about you?"

"I ought not, of course."

Harmony rose, smiling a little.

"Then that's settled. And for goodness' sake, Peter, stop proposing to me every time things go wrong." Her voice changed, grew grave and older, much older than Peter's. "We must not marry, either of us, Peter. Anna is right. There might be an excuse if we were very much in love: but we are not. And loneliness is not a reason."

"I am very lonely," said Peter wistfully.

CHAPTER XIII

PETER took the polished horns to the hospital the next morning and approached Jimmy with his hands behind him and an atmosphere of mystery that enshrouded him like a cloak. Jimmy, having had a good night and having taken the morning's medicine without argument, had been allowed up in a roller chair. It struck Peter with a pang that the boy looked more frail day by day, more transparent.

"I have brought you," said Peter gravely, "the cod-liver oil."

"I've had it!"

"Then guess."

"Dad's letter?"

"You've just had one. Don't be a piggy."

"Animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

"Vegetable," said Peter shamelessly.

"Soft or hard!"

"Soft."

This was plainly a disappointment. A pair of horns might be vegetable; they could hardly be soft.

"A kitten?"

"A kitten is not vegetable James."

"I know. A bowl of gelatin from Harry." For by this time Harmony was his very good friend, admitted to the Jimmy club, which consisted of Nurse Elisabet, the Dozent with the red beard, Anna and Peter, and of course the sentry, who did not know that he belonged.

"Gelatin, to be sure," replied Peter, and produced the horns.

It was a joyous moment in the long low ward, with its triple row of beds, its barred windows, its clean, uneven old floor. As if to add a touch of completeness the sentry outside, peering in, saw the wheeled chair with its occupant, and celebrated this advance along the road to recovery by placing on the window-ledge a wooden replica of himself, bayonet and all, carved from a bit of cigar box.

"Everybody is very nice to me," said Jimmy contentedly. "When my father comes back I shall tell him. He is very fond of people who are kind to me. There was a woman on the ship — What is bulging your pocket, Peter?"

"My handkerchief."

"That is not where you mostly carry your handkerchief."

Peter was injured. He scowled ferociously at being doubted and stood up before the wheeled chair to be searched. The ward watched joyously, while from pocket after pocket of

Peter's old gray suit came Jimmy's salvage — two nuts, a packet of figs, a postcard that represented a stout colonel of hussars on his back on a frozen lake, with a private soldier waiting to go through the various salutations due his rank before assisting him. A gala day, indeed, if one could forget the grave in the little mountain town with only a name on the cross at its head, and if one did not notice that the boy was thinner than ever, that his hands soon tired of playing and lay in his lap, that Nurse Elisabet, who was much inured to death and lived her days with tragedy, caught him to her almost fiercely as she lifted him back from the chair into the smooth white bed.

He fell asleep with Peter's arm under his head and the horns of the deer beside him. On the bedside stand stood the wooden sentry, keeping guard. As Peter drew his arm away he became aware of the Nurse Elisabet beckoning to him from a door at the end of the ward. Peter left the sentinel on guard and tiptoed down the room. Just outside, round a corner, was the Dozent's laboratory, and beyond the tiny closet where he slept, where on a stand was the photograph of the lady he would marry when he had become a professor and required no one's consent.

The Dozent was waiting for Peter. In the

amiable conspiracy which kept the boy happy he was arch-plotter. His familiarity with Austrian intrigue had made him invaluable. He it was who had originated the idea of making Jimmy responsible for the order of the ward, so that a burly Träger quarreling over his daily tobacco with the nurse in charge, or brawling over his soup with another patient, was likely to be hailed in a thin soprano, and to stand, grinning sheepishly, while Jimmy, in mixed English and German, restored the decorum of the ward. They were a quarrelsome lot, the convalescents. Jimmy was so busy some days settling disputes and awarding decisions that he slept almost all night. This was as it should be.

The Dozent waited for Peter. His red beard twitched and his white coat, stained from the laboratory table, looked quite villainous. He held out a letter.

"This has come for the child," he said in quite good English. He was obliged to speak English. Day by day he taught in the clinics Americans who scorned his native tongue, and who brought him the money with which some day he would marry. He liked the English language; he liked Americans because they learned quickly. He held out an envelope with a black border and Peter took it.

"From Paris!" he said. "Who in the world — I suppose I 'd better open it."

"So I thought. It appears a letter of — how you say it? Ah, yes, condolence."

Peter opened the letter and read it. Then without a word he gave it open to the Dozent. There was silence in the laboratory while the Dozent read it, silence except for his canary, which was chipping at a lump of sugar. Peter's face was very sober.

"So. A mother! You knew nothing of a mother?"

"Something from the papers I found. She left when the boy was a baby — went on the stage, I think. He has no recollection of her, which is a good thing. She seems to have been a bad lot."

"She comes to take him away. That is impossible."

"Of course it is impossible," said Peter savagely. "She 's not going to see the child if I can help it. She left because — she 's the boy's mother, but that 's the best you can say of her. This letter — Well, you 've read it."

"She is as a stranger to him?"

"Absolutely. She will come in mourning — look at that black border — and tell him his father is dead, and kill him. I know the type."

The canary chipped at his sugar; the red

beard of the Dozent twitched, as does the beard of one who plots. Peter re-read the gushing letter in his hand and thought fiercely.

"She is on her way here," said the Dozent. "That is bad. Paris to Wien is two days and a night. She may hourly arrive."

"We might send him away — to another hospital."

The Dozent shrugged his shoulders.

"Had I a home — " he said, and glanced through the door to the portrait on the stand. "It would be possible to hide the boy, at least for a time. In the interval the mother might be watched, and if she proved a fit person the boy could be given to her. It is, of course, an affair of police."

This gave Peter pause. He had no money for fines, no time for imprisonment, and he shared the common horror of the great jail. He read the letter again, and tried to read into the lines Jimmy's mother, and failed. He glanced into the ward. Still Jimmy slept. A burly convalescent, with a saber cut from temple to ear and the general appearance of an assassin, had stopped beside the bed and was drawing up the blanket round the small shoulders.

"I can give orders that the woman be not admitted to-day," said the Dozent. "That gives us a few hours. She will go to the police,

and to-morrow she will be admitted. In the mean time —"

"In the mean time," Peter replied, "I 'll try to think of something. If I thought she could be warned and would leave him here —"

"She will not. She will buy him garments and she will travel with him through the Riviera and to Nice. She says Nice. She wishes to be there for carnival, and the boy will die."

Peter took the letter and went home. He rode, that he might read it again in the bus. But no scrap of comfort could he get from it. It spoke of the dead father coldly, and the father had been the boy's idol. No good woman could have been so heartless. It offered the boy a seat in one of the least reputable of the Paris theaters to hear his mother sing. And in the envelope, overlooked before, Peter found a cutting from a French newspaper, a picture of the music-hall type that made him groan. It was indorsed "Mamma."

Harmony had had a busy morning. First she had put her house in order, working deftly, her pretty hair pinned up in a towel — all in order but Peter's room. That was to have a special cleaning later. Next, still with her hair tied up, she had spent two hours with her violin, standing very close to the stove to save fuel and keep her fingers warm. She played well that

morning: even her own critical ears were satisfied, and the Portier, repairing a window lock in an empty room below, was entranced. He sat on the window sill in the biting cold and listened. Many music students had lived in the apartment with the great salon; there had been much music of one sort and another, but none like this.

"She tears my heart from my bosom," muttered the Portier, sighing, and almost swallowed a screw that he held in his teeth.

After the practicing Harmony cleaned Peter's room. She felt very tender toward Peter that day. The hurt left by Mrs. Boyer's visit had died away, but there remained a clear vision of Peter standing behind the chair and offering himself humbly in marriage, so that a bad situation might be made better. And as with a man tenderness expresses itself in the giving of gifts, so with a woman it means giving of service. Harmony cleaned Peter's room.

It was really rather tidy. Peter's few belongings did not spread to any extent and years of bachelorhood had taught him the rudiments of order. Harmony took the covers from washstand and dressing table and washed and ironed them. She cleaned Peter's worn brushes and brought a pincushion of her own for his one extra scarfpin. Finally she brought her own

steamer rug and folded it across the foot of the bed. There was no stove in the room; it had been Harmony's room once, and she knew to the full how cold it could be.

Having made all comfortable for the outer man she prepared for the inner. She was in the kitchen, still with her hair tied up, when Anna came home.

Anna was preoccupied. Instead of her cheery greeting she came somberly back to the kitchen, a letter in her hand. History was making fast that day.

"Hello, Harry," she said. "I 'm going to take a bite and hurry off. Don't bother, I'll attend to myself." She stuffed the letter in her belt and got a plate from a shelf. "How pretty you look with your head tied up! If stupid Peter saw you now he would fall in love with you."

"Then I shall take it off. Peter must be saved!"

Anna sat down at the tiny table and drank her tea. She felt rather better after the tea. Harmony, having taken the towel off, was busy over the brick stove. There was nothing said for a moment. Then: —

"I am out of patience with Peter," said Anna.

"Why?"

"Because he has n't fallen in love with you. Where are his eyes?"

"Please, Anna!"

"It's better as it is, no doubt, for both of you. But it's superhuman of Peter. I wonder —"

"Yes?"

"I think I'll not tell you what I wonder."

And Harmony, rather afraid of Anna's frank speech, did not insist.

As she drank her tea and made a pretense at eating, Anna's thoughts wandered from Peter to Harmony to the letter in her belt and back again to Peter and Harmony. For some time Anna had been suspicious of Peter. From her dozen years of advantage in age and experience she looked down on Peter's thirty years of youth, and thought she knew something that Peter himself did not suspect. Peter being unintrospective, Anna did his heart-searching for him. She believed he was madly in love with Harmony and did not himself suspect it. As she watched the girl over her teacup, revealing herself in a thousand unposed gestures of youth and grace, a thousand lovelinesses, something of the responsibility she and Peter had assumed came over her. She sighed and felt for her letter.

"I've had rather bad news," she said at last.

"From home?"

"Yes. My father — did you know I have a father?"

"You had n't spoken of him."

"I never do. As a father he has n't amounted to much. But he 's very ill, and — I 've a conscience."

Harmony turned a startled face to her.

"You are not going back to America?"

"Oh, no, not now, anyhow. If I become hag-ridden with remorse and do go I 'll find some one to take my place. Don't worry."

The lunch was a silent meal. Anna was hurrying off as Peter came in, and there was no time to discuss Peter's new complication with her. Harmony and Peter ate together, Harmony rather silent. Anna's unfortunate comment about Peter had made her constrained. After the meal Peter, pipe in mouth, carried the dishes to the kitchen, and there it was that he gave her the letter. What Peter's slower mind had been a perceptible time in grasping Harmony comprehended at once — and not only the situation, but its solution.

"Don't let her have him!" she said, putting down the letter. "Bring him here. Oh, Peter, how good we must be to him!"

And that after all was how the thing was settled. So simple, so obvious was it that these three expatriates, these waifs and estrays, banded together against a common poverty, a common loneliness, should share without

question whatever was theirs to divide. Peter and Anna gave cheerfully of their substance, Harmony of her labor, that a small boy should be saved a tragic knowledge until he was well enough to bear it, or until, if God so willed, he might learn it himself without pain.

The friendly sentry on duty again that night proved singularly blind. Thus it happened that, although the night was clear when the twin dials of the Votivkirche showed nine o'clock, he did not notice a cab that halted across the street from the hospital.

Still more strange that, although Peter passed within a dozen feet of him, carrying a wriggling and excited figure wrapped in a blanket and insisting on uncovering its feet, the sentry was able the next day to say that he had observed such a person carrying a bundle, but that it was a short stocky person, quite lame, and that the bundle was undoubtedly clothing going to the laundry.

Perhaps — it is just possible — the sentry had his suspicions. It is undeniable that as Jimmy in the cab on Peter's knee, with Peter's arm close about him, looked back at the hospital, the sentry was going through the manual of arms very solemnly under the stars and facing toward the carriage

CHAPTER XIV

FOR two days at Semmering it rained. The Raxalpe and the Schneeberg sulked behind walls of mist. From the little balcony of the Pension Waldheim one looked out over a sea of cloud, pierced here and there by islands that were crags or by the tops of sunken masts that were evergreen trees. The roads were masses of slippery mud, up which the horses steamed and sweated. The gray cloud fog hung over everything; the barking of a dog loomed out of it near at hand where no dog was to be seen. Children cried and wild birds squawked; one saw them not.

During the second night a landslide occurred on the side of the mountain with a rumble like the noise of fifty trains. In the morning, the rain clouds lifting for a moment, Marie saw the narrow yellow line of the slip.

Everything was saturated with moisture. It did no good to close the heavy wooden shutters at night: in the morning the air of the room was sticky and clothing was moist to the touch. Stewart, confined to the house, grew irritable.

Marie watched him anxiously. She knew

quite well by what slender tenure she held her man. They had nothing in common, neither speech nor thought. And the little Marie's love for Stewart, grown to be a part of her, was largely maternal. She held him by mothering him, by keeping him comfortable, not by a great reciprocal passion that might in time have brought him to her in chains.

And now he was uncomfortable. He chafed against the confinement; he resented the food, the weather. Even Marie's content at her unusual leisure irked him. He accused her of purring like a cat by the fire, and stamped out more than once, only to be driven in by the curious thunderstorms of early Alpine winter.

On the night of the second day the weather changed. Marie, awakening early, stepped out on to the balcony and closed the door carefully behind her. A new world lay beneath her, a marvel of glittering branches, of white plain far below; the snowy mane of the Raxalpe was become a garment. And from behind the villa came the cheerful sound of sleigh-bells, of horses' feet on crisp snow, of runners sliding easily along frozen roads. Even the barking of the dog in the next yard had ceased rumbling and become sharp staccato.

The balcony extended round the corner of

the house. Marie, eagerly discovering her new world, peered about, and seeing no one near ventured so far. The road was in view, and a small girl on ski was struggling to prevent a collision between two plump feet. Even as Marie saw her the inevitable happened and she went headlong into a drift. A governess who had been kneeling before a shrine by the road hastily crossed herself and ran to the rescue.

It was a marvelous morning, a day of days. The governess and the child went on out of vision. Marie stood still, looking at the shrine. A drift had piled about its foot, where the governess had placed a bunch of Alpine flowers. Down on her knees on the balcony went the little Marie, regardless of the snow, and prayed to the shrine of the Virgin below — for what? For forgiveness? For a better life? Not at all. She prayed that the heels of the American girl would keep her in out of the snow.

The prayer of the wicked availeth nothing; even the godly at times must suffer disappointment. And when one prays of heels, who can know of the yearning back of the praying? Marie, rising and dusting her chilled knees, saw the party of Americans on the road, clad in stout boots and swinging along gayly. Marie shrugged her shoulders resignedly. She should have gone to the shrine itself; a balcony was not

a holy place. But one thing she determined — the Americans went toward the Sonnwendstein. She would advise against the Sonnwendstein for that day.

Marie's day of days had begun wrong after all. For Stewart rose with the Sonnwendstein in his mind, and no suggestion of Marie's that in another day a path would be broken had any effect on him. He was eager to be off, committed the extravagance of ordering an egg apiece for breakfast, and finally proclaimed that if Marie feared the climb he would go alone.

Marie made many delays: she dressed slowly, and must run back to see if the balcony door was securely closed. At a little shop where they stopped to buy mountain sticks she must purchase postcards and send them at once. Stewart was fairly patient: air and exercise were having their effect.

It was eleven o'clock when, having crossed the valley, they commenced to mount the slope of the Sonnwendstein. The climb was easy; the road wound back and forward on itself so that one ascended with hardly an effort. Stewart gave Marie a hand here and there, and even paused to let her sit on a boulder and rest. The snow was not heavy; he showed her the footprints of a party that had gone ahead, and to amuse her tried to count the number of

people. When he found it was five he grew thoughtful. There were five in Anita's party. Thanks to Marie's delays they met the Americans coming down. The meeting was a short one: the party went on down, gayly talking. Marie and Stewart climbed silently. Marie's day was spoiled; Stewart had promised to dine at the hotel.

Even the view at the tourist house did not restore Marie's fallen spirits. What were the Vienna plain and the Styrian Alps to her, with this impatient and frowning man beside her consulting his watch and computing the time until he might see the American again? What was prayer, if this were its answer?

They descended rapidly, Stewart always in the lead and setting a pace that Marie struggled in vain to meet. To her tentative and breathless remarks he made brief answer, and only once in all that time did he volunteer a remark. They had reached the Hotel Erzherzog in the valley. The hotel was still closed, and Marie, panting, sat down on an edge of the terrace.

"We have been very foolish," he said.

"Why?"

"Being seen together like that."

"But why? Could you not walk with any woman?"

"It's not that," said Stewart hastily. "I

suppose once does not matter. But we can't be seen together all the time."

Marie turned white. The time had gone by when an incident of the sort could have been met with scorn or with threats; things had changed for Marie Jedlicka since the day Peter had refused to introduce her to Harmony. Then it had been vanity; now it was life itself.

"What you mean," she said with pale lips, "is that we must not be seen together at all. Must I — do you wish me to remain a prisoner while you —" she choked.

"For Heaven's sake," he broke out brutally, "don't make a scene. There are men cutting ice over there. Of course you are not a prisoner. You may go where you like."

Marie rose and picked up her muff.

Marie's sordid little tragedy played itself out in Semmering. Stewart neglected her almost completely; he took fewer and fewer meals at the villa. In two weeks he spent one evening with the girl, and was so irritable that she went to bed crying. The little mountain resort was filling up; there were more and more Americans. Christmas was drawing near and a dozen or so American doctors came up, bringing their families for the holidays. It was difficult to enter a shop without encountering some of them.

To add to the difficulty, the party at the hotel, finding it crowded there, decided to go into a pension and suggested moving to the Waldheim.

Stewart himself was wretchedly uncomfortable. Marie's tragedy was his predicament. He disliked himself very cordially, loathing himself and his situation with the new-born humility of the lover. For Stewart was in love for the first time in his life. Marie knew it. She had not lived with him for months without knowing his every thought, every mood. She grew bitter and hard those days, sitting alone by the green stove in the Pension Waldheim, or leaning, elbows on the rail, looking from the balcony over the valley far below. Bitter and hard, that is, during his absences: he had but to enter the room and her rage died, to be replaced with yearning and little, shy, tentative advances that he only tolerated. Wild thoughts came to Marie, especially at night, when the stars made a crown over the Rax, and in the hotel an orchestra played, while people dined and laughed and loved.

She grew obstinate, too. When in his desperation Stewart suggested that they go back to Vienna she openly scoffed.

"Why?" she demanded. "That you may come back here to her, leaving me there?"

"My dear girl," he flung back exasperated,

"this affair was not a permanent one. You knew that at the start."

"You have taken me away from my work. I have two months' vacation. It is but one month."

"Go back and let me pay —"

"No!"

In pursuance of the plan to leave the hotel the American party came to see the Waldheim, and catastrophe almost ensued. Luckily Marie was on the balcony when the landlady flung open the door, and announced it as Stewart's apartment. But Stewart had a bad five minutes and took it out, manlike, on the girl.

Stewart had another reason for not wishing to leave Semmering. Anita was beautiful, a bit of a coquette, too; as are most pretty women. And Stewart was not alone in his devotion. A member of the party, a New Yorker named Adam, was much in love with the girl and indifferent who knew it. Stewart detested him.

In his despair Stewart wrote to Peter Byrne. It was characteristic of Peter that, however indifferent people might be in prosperity, they always turned to him in trouble. Stewart's letter concluded: —

"I have made out a poor case for myself; but I 'm in a hole, as you can see. I would like

to chuck everything here and sail for home with these people who go in January. But, confound it, Byrne, what am I to do with Marie? And that brings me to what I've been wanting to say all along, and have n't had the courage to. Marie likes you and you rather liked her, did n't you? You could talk her into reason if anybody could. Now that you know how things are, can't you come up over Sunday? It's asking a lot, and I know it; but things are pretty bad."

Peter received the letter on the morning of the day before Christmas. He read it several times and, recalling the look he had seen more than once in Marie Jedlicka's eyes, he knew that things were very bad, indeed.

But Peter was a man of family in those days, and Christmas is a family festival not to be lightly ignored. He wired to Stewart that he would come up as soon as possible after Christmas. Then, because of the look in Marie's eyes and because he feared for her a sad Christmas, full of heartaches and God knows what loneliness, he bought her a most hideous brooch, which he thought admirable in every way and highly ornamental and which he could not afford at all. This he mailed, with a cheery greeting, and feeling happier and much poorer made his way homeward.

CHAPTER XV

CHRISTMAS–EVE in the saloon of Maria Theresa! Christmas-Eve, with the great chandelier recklessly ablaze and a pig's head with cranberry eyes for supper! Christmas-Eve, with a two-foot tree gleaming with candles on the stand, and beside the stand, in a huge chair, Jimmy!

It had been a busy day for Harmony. In the morning there had been shopping and marketing, and such a temptation to be reckless, with the shops full of ecstasies and the old flower women fairly overburdened. There had been anxieties, too, such as the pig's head, which must be done a certain way, and Jimmy, who must be left with the Portier's wife as nurse while all of them went to the hospital. The house revolved around Jimmy now, Jimmy, who seemed the better for the moving, and whose mother as yet had failed to materialize.

In the afternoon Harmony played at the hospital. Peter took her as the early twilight was falling in through the gate where the sentry kept guard and so to the great courtyard. In this grim playground men wandered about,

smoking their daily allowance of tobacco and moving to keep warm, offscourings of the barracks, derelicts of the slums, with here and there an honest citizen lamenting a Christmas away from home. The hospital was always pathetic to Harmony; on this Christmas-Eve she found it harrowing. Its very size shocked her, that there should be so much suffering, so much that was appalling, frightful, insupportable. Peter felt her quiver under his hand.

A hospital in festivity is very affecting. It smiles through its tears. And in every assemblage there are sharply defined lines of difference. There are those who are going home soon, God willing; there are those who will go home some time after long days and longer nights. And there are those who will never go home and who know it. And because of this the ones who are never going home are most festively clad, as if, by way of compensation, the nurses mean to give them all future Christmasses in one. They receive an extra orange or a pair of gloves, perhaps, — and they are not the less grateful because they understand. And when everything is over they lay away in the bedside stand the gloves they will never wear, and divide the extra orange with a less fortunate one who is almost recovered. Their last Christmas is past.

"How beautiful the tree was!" they say. Or, "Did you hear how the children sang? So little, to sing like that! It made me think — of angels."

Peter led Harmony across the courtyard, through many twisting corridors, and up and down more twisting staircases to the room where she was to play. There were many Christmas trees in the hospital that afternoon; no one hall could have held the thousands of patients, the doctors, the nurses. Sometimes a single ward had its own tree, its own entertainment. Occasionally two or three joined forces, preëmpted a lecture-room, and wheeled or hobbled or carried in their convalescents. In such case an imposing audience was the result.

Into such a room Peter led Harmony. It was an amphitheater, the seats rising in tiers, half circle above half circle, to the dusk of the roof. In the pit stood the tree, candle-lighted. There was no other illumination in the room. The semi-darkness, the blazing tree, the rows of hopeful, hoping, hopeless, rising above, white faces over white gowns, the soft rustle of expectancy, the silence when the Dozent with the red beard stepped out and began to read an address — all caught Harmony by the throat. Peter, keenly alive

to everything she did, felt rather than heard her soft sob.

Peter saw the hospital anew that dark afternoon, saw it through Harmony's eyes. Layer after layer his professional callus fell away, leaving him quick again. He had lived so long close to the heart of humanity that he had reduced its throbbing to beats that might be counted. Now, once more, Peter was back in the early days, when a heart was not a pump, but a thing that ached or thrilled or struggled, that loved or hated or yearned.

The orchestra, insisting on sadly sentimental music, was fast turning festivity into gloom. It played Händel's "Largo"; it threw its whole soul into the assurance that the world, after all, was only a poor place, that Heaven was a better. It preached resignation with every deep vibration of the cello. Harmony fidgeted.

"How terrible!" she whispered. "To turn their Christmas-Eve into mourning! Stop them!"

"Stop a German orchestra?"

"They are crying, some of them. Oh, Peter!"

The music came to an end at last. Tears were dried. Followed recitations, gifts, a speech of thanks from Nurse Elisabet for the patients. Then — Harmony.

Harmony never remembered afterward what

she had played. It was joyous, she knew, for the whole atmosphere changed. Laughter came; even the candles burned more cheerfully. When she had finished, a student in a white coat asked her to play a German Volkspiel, and roared it out to her accompaniment with much vigor and humor. The audience joined in, at first timidly, then lustily.

Harmony stood alone by the tree, violin poised, smiling at the applause. Her eyes, running along the dim amphitheater, sought Peter's, and finding them dwelt there a moment. Then she began to play softly and as softly the others sang.

"Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,"—

they sang, with upturned eyes.

"Alles schläft, einsam wacht. . . ."

Visions came to Peter that afternoon in the darkness, visions in which his poverty was forgotten or mattered not at all. Visions of a Christmas-Eve in a home that he had earned, of a tree, of a girl-woman, of a still and holy night, of a child.

"Nur das traute, hoch heilige Paar
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar
Schlaf' in himmlischer Ruh',
Schlaf' in himmlischer Ruh',"

they sang.

There was real festivity at the old lodge of Maria Theresa that night.

Jimmy had taken his full place in the household. The best room, which had been Anna's, had been given up to him. Here, carefully tended, with a fire all day in the stove, Jimmy reigned from the bed. To him Harmony brought her small puzzles and together they solved them.

"Shall it be a steak to-night?" thus Harmony humbly. "Or chops?"

"With tomato sauce?"

"If Peter allows, yes."

Much thinking on Jimmy's part, and then:—

"Fish," he would decide. "Fish with egg dressing."

They would argue for a time, and compromise on fish.

The boy was better. Peter shook his head over any permanent improvement, but Anna fiercely seized each crumb of hope. Many and bitter were the battles she and Peter fought at night over his treatment, frightful the litter of authorities Harmony put straight every morning.

The extra expense was not much, but it told. Peter's carefully calculated expenditures felt the strain. He gave up a course in X-ray on which he had set his heart and cut off his hour in the coffee-house as a luxury. There was no hardship about the latter renunciation. Life

for Peter was spelling itself very much in terms of Harmony and Jimmy those days. He resented anything that took him from them.

There were anxieties of a different sort also. Anna's father was failing. He had written her a feeble, half-senile appeal to let bygones be bygones and come back to see him before he died. Anna was Peter's great prop. What would he do should she decide to go home? He had built his house on the sand, indeed.

So far the threatened danger of a mother to Jimmy had not materialized. Peter was puzzled, but satisfied. He still wrote letters of marvelous adventure; Jimmy still watched for them, listened breathless, treasured them under his pillow. But he spoke less of his father. The open page of his childish mind was being written over with new impressions. "Dad" was already a memory; Peter and Harmony and Anna were realities. Sometimes he called Peter "Dad." At those times Peter caught the boy to him in an agony of tenderness.

And as the little apartment revolved round Jimmy, so was this Christmas-Eve given up to him. All day he had stayed in bed for the privilege of an extra hour propped up among pillows in the salon. All day he had strung little red berries that looked like cranberries for the tree, or fastened threads to the tiny cakes

that were for trimming only, and sternly forbidden to eat.

A marvelous day that for Jimmy. Late in the afternoon the Portier, with a collar on, had mounted the stairs and sheepishly presented him with a pair of white mice in a wooden cage. Jimmy was thrilled. The cage was on his knees all evening, and one of the mice was clearly ill of a cake with pink icing. The Portier's gift was a stealthy one, while his wife was having coffee with her cousin, the brushmaker. But the spirit of Christmas does strange things. That very evening, while the Portier was roistering in a beer hall preparatory to the midnight mass, came the Portier's wife, puffing from the stairs, and brought a puzzle box that only the initiated could open, and when one succeeded at last there was a picture of the Christ-Child within.

Young McLean came to call that evening — came to call and remained to worship. It was the first time since Mrs. Boyer that a visitor had come. McLean, interested with everything and palpably not shocked, was a comforting caller. He seemed to Harmony, who had had bad moments since the day of Mrs. Boyer's visit, to put the hallmark of respectability on the household, to restore it to something it had lost or had never had.

She was quite unconscious of McLean's admiration. She and Anna put Jimmy to bed. The tree candles were burned out; Peter was extinguishing the dying remnants when Harmony came back. McLean was at the piano, thrumming softly. Peter, turning round suddenly, surprised an expression on the younger man's face that startled him.

For that one night Harmony had laid aside her mourning, and wore white, soft white, tucked in at the neck, short-sleeved, trailing. Peter had never seen her in white before.

It was Peter's way to sit back and listen: his steady eyes were always alert, good-humored, but he talked very little. That night he was unusually silent. He sat in the shadow away from the lamp and watched the two at the piano: McLean playing a bit of this or that, the girl bending over a string of her violin. Anna came in and sat down near him.

"The boy is quite fascinated," she whispered. "Watch his eyes!"

"He is a nice boy." This from Peter, as if he argued with himself.

"As men go!" This was a challenge Peter was usually quick to accept. That night he only smiled. "It would be a good thing for her: his people are wealthy."

Money, always money! Peter ground his

teeth over his pipestem. Eminently it would be a good thing for Harmony, this nice boy in his well-made evening clothes, who spoke Harmony's own language of music, who was almost speechless over her playing, and who looked up at her with eyes in which admiration was not unmixed with adoration.

Peter was restless. As the music went on he tiptoed out of the room and took to pacing up and down the little corridor. Each time as he passed the door he tried not to glance in; each time he paused involuntarily. Jealousy had her will of him that night, jealousy, when he had never acknowledged even to himself how much the girl was to him.

Jimmy was restless. Usually Harmony's music put him to sleep; but that night he lay awake, even after Peter had closed all the doors. Peter came in and sat with him in the dark, going over now and then to cover him, or to give him a drink, or to pick up the cage of mice which Jimmy insisted on having beside him and which constantly slipped off on to the floor. After a time Peter lighted the night-light, a bit of wick on a cork floating in a saucer of lard oil, and set it on the bedside table. Then round it he arranged Jimmy's treasures, the deer antlers, the cage of mice, the box, the wooden sentry. The boy fell asleep. Peter sat

in the room, his dead pipe in his teeth, and thought of many things.

It was very late when young McLean left. The two had played until they stopped for very weariness. Anna had yawned herself off to bed. From Jimmy's room Peter could hear the soft hum of their voices.

"You have been awfully good to me," McLean said as he finally rose to go. "I — I want you to know that I'll never forget this evening, never."

"It has been splendid, hasn't it? Since little Scatchy left there has been no one for the piano. I have been lonely sometimes for some one to talk music to."

Lonely! Poor Peter!

"Then you will let me come back?"

"Will I, indeed! I — I'll be grateful."

"How soon would be proper? I dare say to-morrow you'll be busy — Christmas and all that."

"Do you mean you would like to come to-morrow?"

"If old Peter would n't be fussed. He might think —"

"Peter always wants every one to be happy. So if you really care —"

"And I'll not bore you?"

"Rather not!"

"How — about what time?"

"In the afternoon would be pleasant, I think. And then Jimmy can listen. He loves music."

McLean, having found his fur-lined coat, got into it as slowly as possible. Then he missed a glove, and it must be searched for in all the dark corners of the salon until found in his pocket. Even then he hesitated, lingered, loath to break up this little world of two.

"You play wonderfully," he said.

"So do you."

"If only something comes of it! It's curious, is n't it, when you think of it? You and I meeting here in the center of Europe and both of us working our heads off for something that may never pan out."

There was something reminiscent about that to Harmony. It was not until after young McLean had gone that she recalled. It was almost word for word what Peter had said to her in the coffee-house the night they met. She thought it very curious, the coincidence, and pondered it, being ignorant of the fact that it is always a matter for wonder when the man meets the woman, no matter where. Nothing is less curious, more inevitable, more amazing. "You and I," forsooth, said Peter! "You and I," cried young McLean!

CHAPTER XVI

QUITE suddenly Peter's house, built on the sand, collapsed. The shock came on Christmas-Day, after young McLean, now frankly infatuated, had been driven home by Peter.

Peter did it after his own fashion. Harmony, with unflagging enthusiasm, was looking tired. Suggestions to this effect rolled off McLean's back like rain off a roof. Finally Peter gathered up the fur-lined coat, the velours hat, gloves, and stick, and placed them on the piano in front of the younger man.

"I'm sorry you must go," said Peter calmly, "but, as you say, Miss Wells is tired and there is supper to be eaten. Don't let me hurry you."

The Portier was at the door as McLean, laughing and protesting, went out. He brought a cablegram for Anna. Peter took it to her door and waited uneasily while she read it.

It was an urgent summons home; the old father was very low. He was calling for her, and a few days or weeks would see the end. There were things that must be looked after. The need of her was imperative. With the death

the old man's pension would cease and Anna was the bread-winner.

Anna held the paper out to Peter and sat down. Her nervous strength seemed to have deserted her. All at once she was a stricken, elderly woman, with hope wiped out of her face and something nearer resentment than grief in its place.

"It has come, Peter," she said dully. "I always knew it could n't last. They 've always hung about my neck, and now —"

"Do you think you must go? Is n't there some way? If things are so bad you could hardly get there in time, and — you must think of yourself a little, Anna."

"I am not thinking of anything else. Peter, I'm an uncommonly selfish woman, but I —"

Quite without warning she burst out crying, unlovely, audible weeping that shook her narrow shoulders. Harmony heard the sound and joined them. After a look at Anna she sat down beside her and put a white arm over her shoulders. She did not try to speak. Anna's noisy grief subsided as suddenly as it came. She patted Harmony's hand in mute acknowledgment and dried her eyes.

"I 'm not grieving, child," she said; "I 'm only realizing what a selfish old maid I am. I 'm

crying because I'm a disappointment to myself. Harry, I'm going back to America."

And that, after hours of discussion, was where they ended. Anna must go at once. Peter must keep the apartment, having Jimmy to look after and to hide. What was a frightful dilemma to him and to Harmony Anna took rather lightly.

"You'll find some one else to take my place," she said. "If I had a day I could find a dozen."

"And in the interval?" Harmony asked, without looking at Peter.

"The interval! Tut! Peter is your brother, to all intents and purposes. And if you are thinking of scandal-mongers, who will know?"

Having determined to go, no arguments moved Anna, nor could either of the two think of anything to urge beyond a situation she refused to see, or rather a situation she refused to acknowledge. She was not as comfortable as she pretended. During all that long night, while snow sifted down into the ugly yard and made it beautiful, while Jimmy slept and the white mice played, while Harmony tossed and tried to sleep and Peter sat in his cold room and smoked his pipe, Anna packed her untidy belongings and added a name now and then to a list that was meant for Peter, a list of possible substitutes for herself in the little household.

She left early the next morning, a grim little person who bent over the sleeping boy hungrily, and insisted on carrying her own bag down the stairs. Harmony did not go to the station, but stayed at home, pale and silent, hovering around against Jimmy's awakening and struggling against a feeling of panic. Not that she feared Peter or herself. But she was conventional; shielded girls are accustomed to lean for a certain support on the proprieties, as bridgeplayers depend on rules.

Peter came back to breakfast, but ate little. Harmony did not even sit down, but drank her cup of coffee standing, looking down at the snow below. Jimmy still slept.

"Won't you sit down?" said Peter.

"I 'm not hungry, thank you."

"You can sit down without eating."

Peter was nervous. To cover his uneasiness he was distinctly gruff. He pulled a chair out for her and she sat down. Now that they were face to face the tension was lessened. Peter laid Anna's list on the table between them and bent over it toward her.

"You are hurting me very much, Harry," he said. "Do you know why?"

"I? I am only sorry about Anna. I miss her. I — I was fond of her."

"So was I. But that isn't it, Harry. It's something else."

"I'm uncomfortable, Peter."

"So am I. I'm sorry you don't trust me. For that's it."

"Not at all. But, Peter, what will people say?"

"A great deal, if they know. Who is to know? How many people know about us? A handful, at the most, McLean and Mrs. Boyer and one or two others. Of course I can go away until we get some one to take Anna's place, but you'd be here alone at night, and if the youngster had an attack —"

"Oh, no, don't leave him!"

"It's holiday time. There are no clinics until next week. If you'll put up with me —"

"Put up with you, when it is your apartment I use, your food I eat!" She almost choked. "Peter, I must talk about money."

"I'm coming to that. Don't you suppose you more than earn everything? Doesn't it humiliate me hourly to see you working here?"

"Peter! Would you rob me of my last vestige of self-respect?"

This being unanswerable, Peter fell back on his major premise:

"If you'll put up with me for a day or so I'll take this list of Anna's and hunt up some-

body. Just describe the person you desire and I 'll find her." He assumed a certainty he was far from feeling, but it reassured the girl. "A woman, of course?"

"Of course. And not young."

" 'Not young,'" wrote Peter. "Fat?"

Harmony recalled Mrs. Boyer's ample figure and shook her head.

"Not too stout. And agreeable. That 's most important."

" 'Agreeable,'" wrote Peter. "Although Anna was hardly agreeable, in the strict sense of the word, was she?"

"She was interesting, and — and human."

" 'Human!'" wrote Peter. "Wanted, a woman, not young, not too stout, agreeable and human. Shall I advertise?"

The strain was quite gone by that time. Harmony was smiling. Jimmy, waking, called for food, and the morning of the first day was under way.

Peter was well content that morning, in spite of an undercurrent of uneasiness. Before this Anna had shared his proprietorship with him. Now the little household was his. His vicarious domesticity pleased him. He strutted about, taking a new view of his domain; he tightened a doorknob and fastened a noisy window. He inspected the coal-supply and grumbled over

its quality. He filled the copper kettle on the stove, carried in the water for Jimmy's morning bath, cleaned the mouse cage. He even insisted on peeling the little German potatoes, until Harmony cried aloud at his wastefulness and took the knife from him.

And afterward, while Harmony in the sick-room read aloud and Jimmy put the wooden sentry into the cage to keep order, he got out his books and tried to study. But he did little work. His book lay on his knee, his pipe died beside him. The strangeness of the situation came over him, sitting there, and left him rather frightened. He tried to see it from the viewpoint of an outsider, and found himself incredulous and doubting. McLean would resent the situation. Even the Portier was a person to reckon with. The skepticism of the American colony was a thing to fear and avoid.

And over all hung the incessant worry about money; he could just manage alone. He could not, by any method he knew of, stretch his resources to cover a separate arrangement for himself. But he had undertaken to shield a girl-woman and a child, and shield them he would and could.

Brave thoughts were Peter's that snowy morning in the great salon of Maria Theresa, with the cat of the Portier purring before the

fire; brave thoughts, cool reason, with Harmony practicing scales very softly while Jimmy slept, and with Anna speeding through a white world, to the accompaniment of bitter meditation.

Peter had meant to go to Semmering that day, but even the urgency of Marie's need faded before his own situation. He wired Stewart that he would come as soon as he could, and immediately after lunch departed for the club, Anna's list in his pocket, Harmony's requirements in mind. He paused at Jimmy's door on his way out.

"What shall it be to-day?" he inquired. "A postcard or a crayon?"

"I wish I could have a dog."

"We'll have a dog when you are better and can take him walking. Wait until spring, son."

"Some more mice?"

"You will have them — but not to-day."

"What holiday comes next?"

"New Year's Day. Suppose I bring you a New Year's card."

"That's right," agreed Jimmy. "One I can send to Dad. Do you think he will come back this year?" wistfully.

Peter dropped on his baggy knees beside the bed and drew the little wasted figure to him.

"I think you'll surely see him this year, old man," he said huskily.

Peter walked to the Doctors' Club. On the way he happened on little Georgiev, the Bulgarian, and they went on together. Peter managed to make out that Georgiev was studying English, and that he desired to know the state of health and the abode of the Fräulein Wells. Peter evaded the latter by the simple expedient of pretending not to understand. The little Bulgarian watched him earnestly, his smouldering eyes not without suspicion. There had been much talk in the Pension Schwarz about the departure together of the three Americans. The Jew from Galicia still raved over Harmony's beauty.

Georgiev rather hoped, by staying by Peter, to be led toward his star. But Peter left him at the Doctors' Club, still amiable, but absolutely obtuse to the question nearest the little spy's heart.

The club was almost deserted. The holidays had taken many of the members out of town. Other men were taking advantage of the vacation to see the city, or to make acquaintance again with families they had hardly seen during the busy weeks before Christmas. The room at the top of the stairs where the wives of the members were apt to meet for chocolate and to exchange the addresses of dressmakers was empty; in the reading room he found McLean.

Although not a member, McLean was a sort of honorary habitué, being allowed the privilege of the club in exchange for a dependable willingness to play at entertainments of all sorts.

It was in Peter's mind to enlist McLean's assistance in his difficulties. McLean knew a good many people. He was popular, good-looking, and in a colony where, unlike London and Paris, the great majority were people of moderate means, he was conspicuously well off. But he was also much younger than Peter and intolerant with the insolence of youth. Peter was thinking hard as he took off his overcoat and ordered beer.

The boy was in love with Harmony already; Peter had seen that, as he saw many things. How far his love might carry him, Peter had no idea. It seemed to him, as he sat across the reading-table and studied him over his magazine, that McLean would resent bitterly the girl's position, and that when he learned it a crisis might be precipitated.

One of three things might happen: He might bend all his energies to second Peter's effort to fill Anna's place, to find the right person; he might suggest taking Anna's place himself, and insist that his presence in the apartment would be as justifiable as Peter's; or he might

do at once the thing Peter felt he would do eventually, cut the knot of the difficulty by asking Harmony to marry him. Peter, greeting him pleasantly, decided not to tell him anything, to keep him away if possible until the thing was straightened out, and to wait for an hour at the club in the hope that a solution might stroll in for chocolate and gossip.

In any event explanation to McLean would have required justification. Peter disliked the idea. He could humble himself, if necessary, to a woman; he could admit his asininity in assuming the responsibility of Jimmy, for instance, and any woman worthy of the name, or worthy of living in the house with Harmony, would understand. But McLean was young, intolerant. He was more than that, though Peter, concealing from himself just what Harmony meant to him, would not have admitted a rival for what he had never claimed. But a rival the boy was. Peter, calmly reading a magazine and drinking his Munich beer, was in the grip of the fiercest jealousy. He turned pages automatically, to recall nothing of what he had read.

McLean, sitting across from him, watched him surreptitiously. Big Peter, aggressively masculine, heavy of shoulder, direct of speech and eye, was to him the embodiment of all

that a woman should desire in a man. He, too, was jealous, but humbly so. Unlike Peter he knew his situation, was young enough to glory in it. Shameless love is always young; with years comes discretion, perhaps loss of confidence. The Crusaders were youths, pursuing an idea to the ends of the earth and flaunting a lady's guerdon from spear or saddle-bow. The older men among them tucked the handkerchief or bit of a gauntleted glove under jerkin and armor near the heart, and flung to the air the guerdon of some light o' love. McLean would have shouted Harmony's name from the housetops. Peter did not acknowledge even to himself that he was in love with her.

It occurred to McLean after a time that Peter being in the club, and Harmony being in all probability at home, it might be possible to see her alone for a few minutes. He had not intended to go back to the house in the Siebensternstrasse so soon after being peremptorily put out; he had come to the club with the intention of clinching his resolution with a game of cribbage. But fate was playing into his hands. There was no cribbage player round, and Peter himself sat across deeply immersed in a magazine. McLean rose, not stealthily, but without unnecessary noise.

So far so good. Peter turned a page and went on reading. McLean sauntered to a window, hands in pockets. He even whistled a trifle, under his breath, to prove how very casual were his intentions. Still whistling, he moved toward the door. Peter turned another page, which was curiously soon to have read two columns of small type without illustrations.

Once out in the hall McLean's movements gained aim and precision. He got his coat, hat and stick, flung the first over his arm and the second on his head, and —

"Going out?" asked Peter calmly.

"Yes, nothing to do here. I've read all the infernal old magazines until I'm sick of them." Indignant, too, from his tone.

"Walking?"

"Yes."

"Mind if I go with you?"

"Not at all."

Peter, taking down his old overcoat from its hook, turned and caught the boy's eye. It was a swift exchange of glances, but illuminating — Peter's whimsical, but with a sort of grim determination; McLean's sheepish, but equally determined.

"Rotten afternoon," said McLean as they started for the stairs. "Half rain, half snow. Streets are ankle-deep."

"I'm not particularly keen about walking, but — I don't care for this tomb alone."

Nothing was further from McLean's mind than a walk with Peter that afternoon. He hesitated halfway down the upper flight.

"You don't care for cribbage, do you?"

"Don't know anything about it. How about pinochle?"

They had both stopped, equally determined, equally hesitating.

"Pinochle it is," acquiesced McLean. "I was only going because there was nothing to do."

Things went very well for Peter that afternoon — up to a certain point. He beat McLean unmercifully, playing with cold deliberation. McLean wearied, fidgeted, railed at his luck. Peter played on grimly.

The club filled up toward the coffee-hour. Two or three women, wives of members, a young girl to whom McLean had been rather attentive before he met Harmony and who bridled at the abstracted bow he gave her. And, finally, when hope in Peter was dead, one of the women on Anna's list.

Peter, laying down pairs and marking up score, went over Harmony's requirements. Dr. Jennings seemed to fit them all, a woman, not young, not too stout, agreeable and human.

She was a large, almost bovinely placid person, not at all reminiscent of Anna. She was neat where Anna had been disorderly, well dressed and breezy against Anna's dowdiness and sharpness. Peter, having totaled the score, rose and looked down at McLean.

"You're a nice lad," he said, smiling. "Sometime I shall teach you the game."

"How about a lesson to-night in Seven-Star Street?"

"To-night? Why, I 'm sorry. We have an engagement for to-night."

The "we" was deliberate and cruel. McLean writhed. Also the statement was false, but the boy was spared that knowledge for the moment.

Things went well. Dr. Jennings was badly off for quarters. She would make a change if she could better herself. Peter drew her off to a corner and stated his case. She listened attentively, albeit not without disapproval.

She frankly discredited the altruism of Peter's motives when he told her about Harmony. But as the recital went on she found herself rather touched. The story of Jimmy appealed to her. She scolded and lauded Peter in one breath, and what was more to the point, she promised to visit the house in the Siebensternstrasse the next day.

"So Anna Gates has gone home!" she reflected. "When?"

"This morning."

"Then the girl is there alone?"

"Yes. She is very young and inexperienced, and the boy — it 's myocarditis. She 's afraid to be left with him."

"Is she quite alone?"

"Absolutely, and without funds, except enough for her lessons. Our arrangement was that she should keep the house going; that was her share."

Dr. Jennings was impressed. It was impossible to talk to Peter and not believe him. Women trusted Peter always.

"You 've been very foolish, Dr. Byrne," she said as she rose; "but you 've been disinterested enough to offset that and to put some of us to shame. To-morrow at three, if it suits you. You said the Siebensternstrasse?"

Peter went home exultant.

CHAPTER XVII

CHRISTMAS-DAY had had a softening effect on Mrs. Boyer. It had opened badly. It was the first Christmas she had spent away from her children, and there had been little of the holiday spirit in her attitude as she prepared the Christmas breakfast. After that, however, things happened.

In the first place, under her plate she had found a frivolous chain and pendant which she had admired. And when her eyes filled up, as they did whenever she was emotionally moved, the doctor had come round the table and put both his arms about her.

"Too young for you? Not a bit!" he said heartily. "You 're better-looking than you ever were, Jennie; and if you were n't you 're the only woman for me, anyhow. Don't you think I realize what this exile means to you and that you 're doing it for me?"

"I — I don't mind it."

"Yes, you do. To-night we'll go out and make a night of it, shall we? Supper at the Grand, the theater, and then the Tabarin, eh?"

She loosened herself from his arms.

"What shall I wear? Those horrible things the children bought me —"

"Throw 'em away."

"They 're not worn at all."

"Throw them out. Get rid of the things the children got you. Go out to-morrow and buy something you like — not that I don't like you in anything or without —"

"Frank!"

"Be happy, that 's the thing. It 's the first Christmas without the family, and I miss them too. But we 're together, dear. That 's the big thing. Merry Christmas."

An auspicious opening, that, to Christmas-Day. And they had carried out the program as outlined. Mrs. Boyer had enjoyed it, albeit a bit horrified at the Christmas gayety at the Tabarin.

The next morning, however, she awakened with a keen reaction. Her head ached. She had a sense of taint over her. She was virtue rampant again, as on the day she had first visited the old lodge in the Siebensternstrasse.

It is hardly astonishing that by association of ideas Harmony came into her mind again, a brand that might even yet be snatched from the burning. She had been a bit hasty before, she admitted to herself. There *was* a woman doctor named Gates, although her ad-

dress at the club was given as Pension Schwarz. She determined to do her shopping early and then to visit the house in the Siebensternstrasse. She was not a hard woman, for all her inflexible morality, and more than once she had had an uneasy memory of Harmony's bewildered, almost stricken face the afternoon of her visit. She had been a watchful mother over a not particularly handsome family of daughters. This lovely young girl needed mothering and she had refused it. She would go back, and if she found she had been wrong and the girl was deserving and honest, she would see what could be done.

The day was wretched. The snow had turned to rain. Mrs. Boyer, shopping, dragged wet skirts and damp feet from store to store. She found nothing that she cared for after all. The garments that looked chic in the windows or on manikins in the shops, were absurd on her. Her insistent bosom bulged, straight lines became curves or tortuous zigzags, plackets gaped, collars choked her or shocked her by their absence. In the mirror of Marie Jedlicka, clad in familiar garments that had accommodated themselves to the idiosyncrasies of her figure, Mrs. Boyer was a plump, rather comely matron. Here before the plate glass of the modiste, under the glare of a hundred lights, side by side with a

slim Austrian salesgirl who looked like a willow wand, Mrs. Boyer was grotesque, ridiculous, monstrous. She shuddered. She almost wept.

It was bad preparation for a visit to the Siebensternstrasse. Mrs. Boyer, finding her vanity gone, convinced that she was an absurdity physically, fell back for comfort on her soul. She had been a good wife and mother; she was chaste, righteous. God had been cruel to her in the flesh, but He had given her the spirit.

"Madame wishes not the gown? It is beautiful — see the embroidery! And the neck may be filled with chiffon."

"Young woman," she said grimly, "I see the embroidery; and the neck may be filled with chiffon, but not for me! And when you have had five children, you will not buy clothes like that either."

All the kindliness was gone from the visit to the Siebensternstrasse; only the determination remained. Wounded to the heart of her self-esteem, her pride in tatters, she took her way to the old lodge and climbed the stairs.

She found a condition of mild excitement. Jimmy had slept long after his bath. Harmony practiced, cut up a chicken for broth, aired blankets for the chair into which Peter on his return was to lift the boy.

She was called to inspect the mouse-cage, which, according to Jimmy, had strawberries in it.

"Far back," he explained. "There in the cotton, Harry."

But it was not strawberries. Harmony opened the cage and very tenderly took out the cotton nest. Eight tiny pink baby mice, clean washed by the mother, lay curled in a heap.

It was a stupendous moment. The joy of vicarious parentage was Jimmy's. He named them all immediately and demanded food for them. On Harmony's delicate explanation that this was unnecessary, life took on a new meaning for Jimmy. He watched the mother lest she slight one. His responsibility weighed on him. Also his inquiring mind was very busy.

"But how did they get there?" he demanded.

"God sent them, just as he sends babies of all sorts."

"Did he send me?"

"Of course."

"That's a good one on you, Harry. My father found me in a hollow tree."

"But don't you think God had something to do with it?"

Jimmy pondered this.

"I suppose," he reflected, "God sent Daddy to find me so that I would be his little boy.

You never happened to see any babies when you were out walking, did you, Harry?"

"Not in stumps — but I probably was n't looking."

Jimmy eyed her with sympathy.

"You may some day. Would you like to have one?"

"Very much," said Harmony, and flushed delightfully.

Jimmy was disposed to press the matter, to urge immediate maternity on her.

"You could lay it here on the bed," he offered, "and I 'd watch it. When they yell you let 'em suck your finger. I knew a woman once that had a baby and she did that. And it could watch Isabella." Isabella was the mother mouse. "And when I'm better I could take it walking."

"That," said Harmony gravely, "is mighty fine of you, Jimmy boy. I — I 'll think about it." She never denied Jimmy anything, so now she temporized.

"I 'll ask Peter."

Harmony had a half-hysterical moment; then:

"Would n't it be better," she asked, "to keep anything of that sort a secret? And to surprise Peter?"

The boy loved a secret. He played with it in lieu of other occupation. His uncertain future was sown thick with secrets that would never

flower into reality. Thus Peter had shamelessly promised him a visit to the circus when he was able to go, Harmony not to be told until the tickets were bought. Anna had similarly promised to send him from America a pitcher's glove and a baseball bat. To this list of futurities he now added Harmony's baby.

Harmony brought in her violin and played softly to him, not to disturb the sleeping mice. She sang, too, a verse that the Big Soprano had been fond of and that Jimmy loved. Not much of a voice was Harmony's, but sweet and low and very true, as became her violinist's ear.

> "Ah, well! For us all some sweet hope lies
> Deeply buried from human eyes,"

she sang, her clear eyes luminous.

> "And in the hereafter, angels may
> Roll the stone from its grave away!"

Mrs. Boyer mounted the stairs. She was in a very bad humor. She had snagged her skirt on a nail in the old gate, and although that very morning she had detested the suit, her round of shopping had again endeared it to her. She told the Portier in English what she thought of him, and climbed ponderously, pausing at each landing to examine the damage.

Harmony, having sung Jimmy to sleep, was in the throes of an experiment. She was trying to smoke.

A very human young person was Harmony, apt to be exceedingly wretched if her hat were of last year's fashion, anxious to be inconspicuous by doing what every one else was doing, conventional as are the very young, fearful of being an exception.

And nearly every one was smoking. Many of the young women whom she met at the master's house had yellowed fingers and smoked in the anteroom; the Big Soprano had smoked; Anna and Scatchy had smoked; in the coffee-houses milliners' apprentices produced little silver mouth-pieces to prevent soiling their pretty lips and smoked endlessly. Even Peter had admitted that it was not a vice, but only a comfortable bad habit. And Anna had left a handful of cigarettes.

Harmony was not smoking; she was experimenting. Peter and Anna had smoked together and it had looked comradely. Perhaps, without reasoning it out, Harmony was experimenting toward the end of establishing her relations with Peter still further on friendly and comradely grounds. Two men might smoke together; a man and a woman might smoke together as friends. According

to Harmony's ideas, a girl paring potatoes might inspire sentiment, but smoking a cigarette — never!

She did not like it. She thought, standing before her little mirror, that she looked fast, after all. She tried pursing her lips together, as she had seen Anna do, and blowing out the smoke in a thin line. She smoked very hard, so that she stood in the center of a gray nimbus. She hated it, but she persisted. Perhaps it grew on one; perhaps, also, if she walked about it would choke her less. She practiced holding the thing between her first and second fingers, and found that easier than smoking. Then she went to the salon where there was more air, and tried exhaling through her nose. It made her sneeze.

On the sneeze came Mrs. Boyer's ring. Harmony thought very fast. It might be the bread or the milk, but again — She flung the cigarette into the stove, shut the door, and answered the bell.

Mrs. Boyer's greeting was colder than she had intended. It put Harmony on the defensive at once, made her uncomfortable. Like all the innocent falsely accused she looked guiltier than the guiltiest. Under Mrs. Boyer's searching eyes the enormity of her situation overwhelmed her. And over all, through salon and passage, hung the damning odor of the cigarette. Har-

mony, leading the way in, was a sheep before her shearer.

"I'm calling on all of you," said Mrs. Boyer, sniffing. "I meant to bring Dr. Boyer's cards for every one, including Dr. Byrne."

"I'm sorry. Dr. Byrne is out."

"And Dr. Gates?"

"She — she is away."

Mrs. Boyer raised her eyebrows and ostentatiously changed the subject, requesting a needle and thread to draw the rent together. It had been in Harmony's mind to explain the situation, to show Jimmy to Mrs. Boyer, to throw herself on the older woman's sympathy, to ask advice. But the visitor's attitude made this difficult. To add to her discomfort, through the grating in the stove door was coming a thin thread of smoke.

It was, after all, Mrs. Boyer who broached the subject again. She had had a cup of tea, and Harmony, sitting on a stool, had mended the rent so that it could hardly be seen. Mrs. Boyer, softened by the tea and by the proximity of Harmony's lovely head bent over her task, grew slightly more expansive.

"I ought to tell you something, Miss Wells," she said. "You remember my other visit?"

"Perfectly." Harmony bent still lower.

"I did you an injustice at that time. I've

been sorry ever since. I thought that there was no Dr. Gates. I'm sorry, but I'm not going to deny it. People do things in this wicked city that they wouldn't do at home. I confess I misjudged Peter Byrne. You can give him my apologies, since he won't see me."

"But he isn't here or of course he'd see you."

"Then," demanded Mrs. Boyer grimly, "if Peter Byrne is not here, who has been smoking cigarettes in this room? There is one still burning in that stove!"

Harmony's hand was forced. She was white as she cut the brown-silk thread and rose to her feet.

"I think," she said, "that I'd better go back a few weeks, Mrs. Boyer, and tell you a story, if you have time to listen."

"If it is disagreeable —"

"Not at all. It is about Peter Byrne and myself, and — some others. It is really about Peter. Mrs. Boyer, will you come very quietly across the hall?"

Mrs. Boyer, expecting Heaven knows what, rose with celerity. Harmony led the way to Jimmy's door and opened it. He was still asleep, a wasted small figure on the narrow bed. Beside him the mice frolicked in their

cage, the sentry kept guard over Peter's shameless letters from the Tyrol, the strawberry babies wriggled in their cotton.

"We are not going to have him very long," said Harmony softly. "Peter is making him happy for a little while."

Back in the salon of Maria Theresa she told the whole story. Mrs. Boyer found it very affecting. Harmony sat beside her on a stool and she kept her hand on the girl's shoulder. When the narrative reached Anna's going away, however, she took it away. From that point on she sat uncompromisingly rigid and listened.

"Then you mean to say," she exploded when Harmony had finished, "that you intend to stay on here, just the two of you?"

"And Jimmy."

"Bah! What has the child to do with it?"

"We will find some one to take Anna's place."

"I doubt it. And until you do?"

"There is nothing wicked in what we are doing. Don't you see, Mrs. Boyer, I can't leave the boy."

"Since Peter is so altruistic, let him hire a nurse."

Bad as things were, Harmony smiled.

"A nurse!" she said. "Why, do you realize that he is keeping three people now on what is starvation for one?"

"Then he 's a fool!" Mrs. Boyer rose in majesty. "I 'm not going to leave you here."

"I 'm sorry. You must see —"

"I see nothing but a girl deliberately putting herself in a compromising position and worse."

"Mrs. Boyer!"

"Get your things on. I guess Dr. Boyer and I can look after you until we can send you home."

"I am not going home — yet," said poor Harmony, biting her lip to steady it.

Back and forth waged the battle, Mrs. Boyer assailing, Harmony offering little defense but standing firm on her refusal to go as long as Peter would let her remain.

"It means so much to me," she ventured, goaded. "And I earn my lodging and board. I work hard and — I make him comfortable. It costs him very little and I give him something in exchange. All men are not alike. If the sort you have known are — are different —"

This was unfortunate. Mrs. Boyer stiffened. She ceased offensive tactics, and retired grimly into the dignity of her high calling of virtuous wife and mother. She washed her hands of Harmony and Peter. She tied on her veil with shaking hands, and prepared to leave Harmony to her fate.

"Give me your mother's address," she demanded.

"Certainly not."

"You absolutely refuse to save yourself?"

"From what? From Peter? There are many worse people than Peter to save myself from, Mrs. Boyer — uncharitable people, and — and cruel people."

Mrs. Boyer shrugged her plump shoulders.

"Meaning me!" she retorted. "My dear child, people are always cruel who try to save us from ourselves."

Unluckily for Harmony, one of Anna's specious arguments must pop into her head at that instant and demand expression.

"People are living their own lives these days, Mrs. Boyer; old standards have gone. It is what one's conscience condemns that is wrong, is n't it? Not merely breaking laws that were made to fit the average, not the exception."

Anna! Anna!

Mrs. Boyer flung up her hands.

"You are impossible!" she snapped. "After all, I believe it is Peter who needs protection! I shall speak to him."

She started down the staircase, but turned for a parting volley.

"And just a word of advice: Perhaps the old standards have gone. But if you really expect to find a respectable woman to chaperon you, keep your views to yourself."

Harmony, a bruised and wounded thing, crept into Jimmy's room and sank on her knees beside the bed. One small hand lay on the coverlet; she dared not touch it for fear of waking him — but she laid her cheek close to it for comfort. When Peter came in, much later, he found the boy wide awake and Harmony asleep, a crumpled heap beside the bed.

"I think she's been crying," Jimmy whispered. "She's been sobbing in her sleep. And strike a match, Peter; there may be more mice."

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. BOYER, bursting with indignation, went to the Doctors' Club. It was typical of the way things were going with Peter that Dr. Boyer was not there, and that the only woman in the clubrooms should be Dr. Jennings. Young McLean was in the reading room, eating his heart out with jealousy of Peter, vacillating between the desire to see Harmony that night and fear lest Peter forbid him the house permanently if he made the attempt. He had found a picture of the Fräulein Engel, from the opera, in a magazine, and was sitting with it open before him. Very deeply and really in love was McLean that afternoon, and the Fräulein Engel and Harmony were not unlike. The double doors between the reading room and the reception room adjoining were open. McLean, lost in a rosy future in which he and Harmony sat together for indefinite periods, with no Peter to scowl over his books at them, a future in which life was one long piano-violin duo, with the candles in the chandelier going out one by one, leaving them at last alone in scented darkness together — McLean heard

nothing until the mention of the Siebenstern-strasse roused him.

After that he listened. He heard that Dr. Jennings was contemplating taking Anna's place at the lodge, and he comprehended after a moment that Anna was already gone. Even then the significance of the situation was a little time in dawning on him. When it did, however, he rose with a stifled oath.

Mrs. Boyer was speaking.

"It is exactly as I tell you," she was saying. "If Peter Byrne is trying to protect her reputation he is late doing it. Personally I have been there twice. I never saw Anna Gates. And she is registered here at the club as living in the Pension Schwarz. Whatever the facts may be, one thing remains, she is not there now."

McLean waited to hear no more. He was beside himself with rage. He found a "comfortable" at the curb. The driver was asleep inside the carriage. McLean dragged him out by the shoulder and shouted an address to him. The cab bumped along over the rough streets to an accompaniment of protests from its frantic passenger.

The boy was white-lipped with wrath and fear. Peter's silence that afternoon as to the state of affairs loomed large and significant. He had thought once or twice that Peter was

in love with Harmony; he knew it now in the clearer vision of the moment. He recalled things that maddened him: the dozen intimacies of the little ménage, the caress in Peter's voice when he spoke to the girl, Peter's steady eyes in the semi-gloom of the salon while Harmony played.

At a corner they must pause for the inevitable regiment. McLean cursed, bending out to see how long the delay would be. Peter had been gone for half an hour, perhaps, but Peter would walk. If he could only see the girl first, talk to her, tell her what she would be doing by remaining —

He was there at last, flinging across the courtyard like a madman. Peter was already there; his footprints were fresh in the slush of the path. The house door was closed but not locked. McLean ran up the stairs. It was barely twilight outside, but the staircase well was dark. At the upper landing he was compelled to fumble for the bell.

Peter admitted him. The corridor was unlighted, but from the salon came a glow of lamplight. McLean, out of breath and furious, faced Peter.

"I want to see Harmony," he said without preface.

Peter eyed him. He knew what had happened, had expected it when the bell rang, had antici-

pated it when Harmony told him of Mrs. Boyer's visit. In the second between the peal of the bell and his opening the door he had decided what to do.

"Come in."

McLean stepped inside. He was smaller than Peter, not so much shorter as slenderer. Even Peter winced before the look in his eyes.

"Where is she?"

"In the kitchen, I think. Come into the salon."

McLean flung off his coat. Peter closed the door behind him and stood just inside. He had his pipe as usual. "I came to see her, not you, Byrne."

"So I gather. I'll let you see her, of course, but don't you want to see me first?"

"I want to take her away from here."

"Why? Are you better able to care for her than I am?"

McLean stood rigid. He had thrust his clenched hands into his pockets.

"You're a scoundrel, Byrne," he said steadily. "Why didn't you tell me this this afternoon?"

"Because I knew if I did you'd do just what you are doing."

"Are you going to keep her here?"

Peter changed color at the thrust, but he kept himself in hand.

"I'm not keeping her here," he said patiently. "I'm doing the best I can under the circumstances."

"Then your best is pretty bad."

"Perhaps. If you would try to remember the circumstances, McLean,— that the girl has no place else to go, practically no money, and that I —"

"I remember one circumstance, that you are living here alone with her and that you're crazy in love with her."

"That has nothing to do with you. As long as I treat her —"

"Bah!"

"Will you be good enough to let me finish what I am trying to say? She's safe with me. When I say that I mean it. She will not go away from here with you or with any one else if I can prevent it. And if you care enough about her to try to keep her happy you'll not let her know you have been here. I've got a woman coming to take Anna's place. That ought to satisfy you."

"Dr. Jennings?"

"Yes."

"She'll not come. Mrs. Boyer has been talking to her. Inside of an hour the whole club will have it — every American in Vienna will know about it in a day or so. I tell you, Byrne, you're doing an awful thing."

Peter drew a long breath. He had had his bad half-hour before McLean came; had had to stand by, wordless, and see Harmony trying to smile, see her dragging about, languid and white, see her tragic attempts to greet him on the old familiar footing. Through it all he had been sustained by the thought that a day or two days would see the old footing reëstablished, another woman in the house, life again worth the living and Harmony smiling up frankly into his eyes. Now this hope had departed.

"You can't keep me from seeing her, you know," McLean persisted. "I've got to put this thing to her. She's got to choose."

"What alternative have you to suggest?"

"I'd marry her if she'd have me."

After all Peter had expected that. And, if she cared for the boy would n't that be best for her? What had he to offer against that? He could n't marry. He could only offer her shelter, against everything else. Even then he did not dislike McLean. He was a man, every slender inch of him, this boy musician. Peter's heart sank, but he put down his pipe and turned to the door.

"I'll call her," he said. "But, since this concerns me very vitally, I should like to be here while you put the thing to her. After that if you like —"

He called Harmony. She had given Jimmy his supper and was carrying out a tray that seemed hardly touched.

"He won't eat to-night," she said miserably. "Peter, if he stops eating, what can we do? He is so weak!"

Peter, took the tray from her gently.

"Harry dear," he said, "I want you to come into the salon. Some one wishes to speak to you."

"To me?"

"Yes. Harry, do you remember that evening in the kitchen when — Do you recall what I promised?"

"Yes, Peter."

"You are sure you know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"That's all right, then. McLean wants to see you."

She hesitated, looking up at him.

"McLean? You look so grave, Peter. What is it?"

"He will tell you. Nothing alarming."

Peter gave McLean a minute alone after all, while he carried the tray to the kitchen. He had no desire to play watchdog over the girl, he told himself savagely; only to keep himself straight with her and to save her from McLean's impetuosity. He even waited in the kitchen to fill and light his pipe.

McLean had worked himself into a very fair passion. He was intense, almost theatrical, as he stood with folded arms waiting for Harmony. So entirely did the girl fill his existence that he forgot, or did not care to remember, how short a time he had known her. As Harmony she dominated his life and his thoughts; as Harmony he addressed her when, rather startled, she entered the salon and stood just inside the closed door.

"Peter said you wanted to speak to me."

McLean groaned. "Peter!" he said. "It is always Peter. Look here, Harmony, you cannot stay here."

"It is only for a few hours. To-morrow some one is coming. And, anyhow, Peter is going to Semmering. We know it is unusual, but what can we do?"

"Unusual! It 's — it 's damnable. It 's the appearance of the thing, don't you see that?"

"I think it is rather silly to talk of appearance when there is no one to care. And how can I leave? Jimmy needs me all the time —"

"That 's another idiocy of Peter's. What does he mean by putting you in this position?"

"I am one of Peter's idiocies."

Peter entered on that. He took in the situation with a glance, and Harmony turned to him; but if she had expected Peter to support

her, she was disappointed. Whatever decision she was to make must be her own, in Peter's troubled mind. He crossed the room and stood at one of the windows, looking out, a passive participant in the scene.

The day had been a trying one for Harmony. What she chose to consider Peter's defection was a fresh stab. She glanced from McLean, flushed and excited, to Peter's impassive back. Then she sat down, rather limp, and threw out her hands helplessly.

"What am I to do?" she demanded. "Every one comes with cruel things to say, but no one tells me what to do."

Peter turned away from the window.

"You can leave here," ventured McLean. "That's the first thing. After that —"

"Yes, and after that, what?"

McLean glanced at Peter. Then he took a step toward the girl.

"You could marry me, Harmony," he said unsteadily. "I had n't expected to tell you so soon, or before a third person." He faltered before Harmony's eyes, full of bewilderment. "I 'd be very happy if you — if you could see it that way. I care a great deal, you see."

It seemed hours to Peter before she made any reply, and that her voice came from miles away.

"Is it really as bad as that?" she asked.

"Have I made such a mess of things that some one, either you or Peter, must marry me to straighten things out? I don't want to marry any one. Do I have to?"

"Certainly you don't have to," said Peter. There was relief in his voice, relief and also something of exultation. "McLean, you mean well, but marriage is n't the solution. We were getting along all right until our friends stepped in. Let Mrs. Boyer howl all over the colony; there will be one sensible woman somewhere to come and be comfortable here with us. In the interval we 'll manage, unless Harmony is afraid. In that case —"

"Afraid of what?"

The two men exchanged glances, McLean helpless, Peter triumphant.

"I do not care what Mrs. Boyer says, at least not much. And I am not afraid of anything else at all."

McLean picked up his overcoat.

"At least," he appealed to Peter, "you 'll come over to my place?"

"No!" said Peter.

McLean made a final appeal to Harmony.

"If this gets out," he said, "you are going to regret it all your life."

"I shall have nothing to regret," she retorted proudly.

Had Peter not been there McLean would have made a better case, would have pleaded with her, would have made less of a situation that roused her resentment and more of his love for her. He was very hard hit, very young. He was almost hysterical with rage and helplessness; he wanted to slap her, to take her in his arms. He writhed under the restraint of Peter's steady eyes.

He got to the door and turned, furious.

"Then it's up to you," he flung at Peter. "You're old enough to know better; she is n't. And don't look so damned superior. You're human, like the rest of us. And if any harm comes to her —"

Here unexpectedly Peter held out his hand, and after a sheepish moment McLean took it.

"Good-night, old man," said Peter. "And — don't be an ass."

As was Peter's way, the words meant little, the tone much. McLean knew what in his heart he had known all along — that the girl was safe enough; that all that was to fear was the gossip of scandal-lovers. He took Peter's hand, and then going to Harmony stood before her very erect.

"I suppose I've said too much; I always do," he said contritely. "But you know the reason. Don't forget the reason, will you?"

"I am only sorry."

He bent over and kissed her hand lingeringly. It was a tragic moment for him, poor lad! He turned and went blindly out the door and down the dark stone staircase. It was rather anti-climax, after all that, to have Peter discover he had gone without his hat and toss it down to him a flight below.

All the frankness had gone out of the relationship between Harmony and Peter. They made painful efforts at ease, talked during the meal of careful abstractions, such as Jimmy, and Peter's proposed trip to Semmering, avoided each other's eyes, ate little or nothing. Once when Harmony passed Peter his coffee-cup their fingers touched, and between them they dropped the cup. Harmony was flushed and pallid by turns, Peter wretched and silent.

Out of the darkness came one ray of light. Stewart had wired from Semmering, urging Peter to come. He would be away for two days. In two days much might happen; Dr. Jennings might come or some one else. In two days some of the restraint would have worn off. Things would never be the same, but they would be forty-eight hours better.

Peter spent the early part of the evening with Jimmy, reading aloud to him. After the child had dropped to sleep he packed a valise

for the next day's journey and counted out into an envelope half of the money he had with him. This he labeled "Household Expenses" and set it up on his table, leaning against his collar-box. There was no sign of Harmony about. The salon was dark except for the study lamp turned down.

Peter was restless. He put on his shabby dressing-gown and worn slippers and wandered about. The Portier had brought coal to the landing; Peter carried it in. He inspected the medicine bottles on Jimmy's stand and wrote full directions for every emergency he could imagine. Then, finding it still only nine o'clock, he turned up the lamp in the salon and wrote an exciting letter from Jimmy's father, in which a lost lamb, wandering on the mountain-side, had been picked up by an avalanche and carried down into the fold and the arms of the shepherd. And because he stood so *in loco parentis*, and because it seemed so inevitable that before long Jimmy would be in the arms of the Shepherd, and, of course, because it had been a trying day all through, Peter's lips were none too steady as he folded up the letter.

The fire was dead in the stove; Peter put out the salon lamp and closed the shutters. In the warm darkness he put out his hand to feel his way through the room. It touched a little

sweater coat of Harmony's, hanging over the back of a chair. Peter picked it up in a very passion of tenderness and held it to him.

"Little girl!" he choked. "My little girl! God help me!"

He was rather ashamed, considerably startled. It alarmed him to find that the mere unexpected touch of a familiar garment could rouse such a storm in him. It made him pause. He put down the coat and pulled himself up sharply. McLean was right; he was only human stuff, very poor human stuff. He put the little coat down hastily, only to lift it again gently to his lips.

"Good-night, dear," he whispered. "Good-night, Harmony."

Frau Schwarz had had two visitors between the hours of coffee and supper that day. The reason of their call proved to be neither rooms nor pension. They came to make inquiries.

The Frau Schwarz made this out at last, and sat down on the edge of the bed in the room that had once been Peter's and that still lacked an occupant.

Mrs. Boyer had no German; Dr. Jennings very little and that chiefly medical. There is, however, a sort of code that answers instead of language frequently, when two or three women of later middle life are gathered together, a

code born of mutual understanding, mutual disillusion, mutual distrust, a language of outspread hands, raised eyebrows, portentous shakings of the head. Frau Schwarz, on the edge of Peter's tub-shaped bed, needed no English to convey the fact that Peter was a bad lot. Not that she resorted only to the sign language.

"The women were also wicked," she said. "Of a man what does one expect? But of a woman! And the younger one looked — Herr Gott! She had the eyes of a saint! The little Georgiev was mad for her. When the three of them left, disgraced, as one may say, he came to me, he threatened me. The Herr Schwarz, God rest his soul, was a violent man, but never spoke he so to me!"

"She says," interpreted Dr. Jennings, "that they were a bad lot — that the younger one made eyes at the Herr Schwarz!"

Mrs. Boyer drew her ancient sables about her and put a tremulous hand on the other woman's arm.

"What an escape for you!" she said. "If you had gone there to live and then found the establishment — queer!"

From the kitchen of the pension, Olga was listening, an ear to the door. Behind her, also listening, but less advantageously, was Katrina.

"American ladies!" said Olga. "Two, old and fat."

"More hot water!" growled Katrina. "Why do not the Americans stay in their own country, where the water, I have learned, comes hot from the earth."

Olga, bending forward, opened the door a crack wider.

"Sh! They do not come for rooms. They inquire for the Herr Doktor Byrne and the others!"

"No!"

"Of a certainty."

"Then let me to the door!"

"A moment. She tells them everything and more. She says — how she is wicked, Katrina! She says the Fräulein Harmony was not good, that she sent them all away. Here, take the door!"

Thus it happened that Dr. Jennings and Mrs. Boyer, having shaken off the dust of a pension that had once harbored three malefactors, and having retired Peter and Anna and Harmony into the limbo of things best forgotten or ignored, found themselves, at the corner, confronted by a slovenly girl in heelless slippers and wearing a knitted shawl over her head.

"The Frau Schwarz is wrong," cried Olga

passionately in Vienna dialect. "They were good, all of them!"

"What in the world —"

"And, please, tell me where lives the Fräulein Harmony. The Herr Georgiev eats not nor sleeps that he cannot find her."

Dr. Jennings was puzzled.

"She wishes to know where the girl lives," she interpreted to Mrs. Boyer. "A man wishes to know."

"Naturally!" said Mrs. Boyer. "Well, don't tell her."

Olga gathered from the tone rather than the words that she was not to be told. She burst into a despairing appeal in which the Herr Georgiev, Peter, a necktie Peter had forgotten, open windows, and hot water were inextricably confused. Dr. Jennings listened, then waved her back with a gesture.

"She says," she interpreted as they walked on, "that Dr. Peter — by which I suppose she means Dr. Byrne — has left a necktie, and that she'll be in hot water if she does not return it."

Mrs. Boyer sniffed.

"In love with him, probably, like the others!" she said.

CHAPTER XIX

PETER went to Semmering the next morning, tiptoeing out very early and without breakfast. He went in to cover Jimmy, lying diagonally across his small bed amid a riot of tossed blankets. The communicating door into Harmony's room was open. Peter kept his eyes carefully from it, but his ears were less under control. He could hear her soft breathing. There were days coming when Peter would stand where he stood then and listen, and find only silence.

He tore himself away at last, closing the outer door carefully behind him and lighting a match to find his way down the staircase. The Portier was not awake. Peter had to rouse him, and to stand by while he donned the trousers which he deemed necessary to the dignity of his position before he opened the street door.

Reluctant as he had been to go, the change was good for Peter. The dawn grew rosy, promised sunshine, fulfilled its promise. The hurrying crowds at the depot interested him: he enjoyed his coffee, taken from a bare table in the station. The horizontal morning sun-

light, shining in through marvelously clean windows, warmed the marble of the floor, made black shadows beside the heaps of hand luggage everywhere, turned into gold the hair of a toddling baby venturing on a tour of discovery. The same morning light, alas! revealed to Peter a break across the toe of one of his shoes. Peter sighed, then smiled. The baby was catching at the bits of dust that floated in the sunshine.

Suddenly a great wave of happiness overwhelmed Peter. It was a passing thing, born of nothing, but for the instant that it lasted Peter was a king. Everything was well. The world was his oyster. Life was his, to make it what he would — youth and hope and joy. Under the beatific influence he expanded, grew, almost shone. Youth and hope and joy — that cometh in the morning.

The ecstasy passed away, but without reaction. Peter no longer shone; he still glowed. He picked up the golden-haired baby and hugged it. He hunted out a beggar he had passed and gave him five Hellers. He helped a suspicious old lady with an oilcloth-covered bundle; he called the guard on the train "son" and forced a grin out of that dignitary.

Peter traveled third-class, which was quite comfortable, and no bother about "Nicht

Rauchen" signs. His unreasonable cheerfulness persisted as far as Gloggnitz. There, with the increasing ruggedness of the scenery and his first view of the Raxalpe, came recollection of the urgency of Stewart's last message, of Marie Jedlicka, of the sordid little tragedy that awaited him at the end of his journey.

Peter sobered. Life was rather a mess, after all, he reflected. Love was a blessing, but it was also a curse. After that he sat back in his corner and let the mountain scenery take care of itself, while he recalled the look he had surprised once or twice in Marie's eyes when she looked at Stewart. It was sad, pitiful. Marie was a clever little thing. If only she 'd had a chance! — Why was n't he rich enough to help the ones who needed help. Marie could start again in America, with no one the wiser, and make her way.

"Smart as the devil, these Austrian girls!" Peter reflected. "Poor little guttersnipe!"

The weather was beautiful. The sleet of the previous day in Vienna had been a deep snowfall on the mountains. The Schwarza was frozen, the castle of Liechtenstein was gray against a white world. A little pilgrimage church far below seemed snowed in against the faithful. The third-class compartment filled with noisy skiing parties. The old woman opened

her oilcloth bundle, and taking a cat out of a box inside fed it a sausage.

Up and up, past the Weinzettelwand and the Station Breitenstein, across the highest viaduct, the Kalte Rinne, and so at last to Semmering.

The glow had died at last for Peter. He did not like his errand, was very vague, indeed, as to just what that errand might be. He was stiff and rather cold. Also he thought the cat might stifle in the oilcloth, but the old woman too clearly distrusted him to make it possible to interfere. Anyhow, he did not know the German for either cat or oilcloth.

He had wired Stewart; but the latter was not at the station. This made him vaguely uneasy, he hardly knew why. He did not know Stewart well enough to know whether he was punctilious in such matters or not: as a matter of fact he hardly knew him at all. It was because he had appealed to him that Peter was there, it being only necessary to Peter to be needed, and he was anywhere.

The Pension Waldheim was well up the mountains. He shouldered his valise and started up — first long flights of steps through the pines, then a steep road. Peter climbed easily. Here and there he met groups coming down, men that he thought probably American, pretty

women in "tams" and sweaters. He watched for Marie, but there was no sign of her.

He was half an hour, perhaps, in reaching the Waldheim. As he turned in at the gate he noticed a sledge, with a dozen people following it, coming toward him. It was a singularly silent party. Peter, with his hand on the door-knocker, watched its approach with some curiosity.

It stopped, and the men who had been following closed up round it. Even then Peter did not understand. He did not understand until he saw Stewart, limp and unconscious, lifted out of the straw and carried toward him.

Suicide may be moral cowardice; but it requires physical bravery. And Marie was not brave. The balcony had attracted her: it opened possibilities of escape, of unceasing regret and repentance for Stewart, of publicity that would mean an end to the situation. But every inch of her soul was craven at the thought. She crept out often and looked down, and as often drew back, shuddering. To fall down, down on to the tree tops, to be dropped from branch to branch, a broken thing, and perhaps even not yet dead — that was the unthinkable thing, to live for a time and suffer!

Stewart was not ignorant of all that went on in her mind. She had threatened him with

the balcony, just as, earlier in the winter, it had been a window-ledge with which she had frightened him. But there was this difference, whereas before he had drawn her back from the window and slapped her into sanity, now he let her alone. At the end of one of their quarrels she had flung out on to the balcony, and then had watched him through the opening in the shutter. He had lighted a cigarette!

Stewart spent every daylight hour at the hotel, or walking over the mountain roads, seldom alone with Anita, but always near her. He left Marie sulking or sewing, as the case might be. He returned in the evening to find her still sulking, still sewing.

But Marie did not sulk all day, or sew. She too was out, never far from Stewart, always watching. Many times she escaped discovery only by a miracle, as when she stooped behind an oxcart, pretending to tie her shoe, or once when they all met face to face, and although she lowered her veil Stewart must have known her instantly had he not been so intent on helping Anita over a slippery gutter.

She planned a dozen forms of revenge and found them impossible of execution. Stewart himself was frightfully unhappy. For the first time in his life he was really in love, with all the humility of the condition. There were days

when he would not touch Anita's hand, when he hardly spoke, when the girl herself would have been outraged at his conduct had she not now and then caught him watching her, seen the wretchedness in his eyes.

The form of Marie's revenge was unpremeditated, after all. The light mountain snow was augmented by a storm; roads were ploughed through early in the morning, leaving great banks on either side. Sleigh-bells were everywhere. Coasting parties made the steep roads a menace to the pedestrian; every up-climbing sleigh carried behind it a string of sleds, going back to the starting-point.

Below the hotel was the Serpentine Coast, a long and dangerous course, full of high-banked curves, of sudden descents, of long straightaway dashes through the woodland. Two miles, perhaps three, it wound its tortuous way down the mountain. Up by the highroad to the crest again, only a mile or less. Thus it happened that the track was always clear, except for speeding sleds. No coasters, dragging sleds back up the slide, interfered.

The track was crowded. Every minute a sled set out, sped down the straightaway, dipped, turned, disappeared. A dozen would be lined up, waiting for the interval and the signal. And here, watching from the porch of the church,

in the very shadow of the saints, Marie found her revenge.

Stewart had given her a little wrist watch. Stewart and Anita were twelfth in line. By the watch, then, twelve minutes down the mountain-side, straight down through the trees to a curve that Marie knew well, a bad curve, only to be taken by running well up on the snowbank. Beyond the snowbank there was a drop, fifteen feet, perhaps more, into the yard of a Russian villa. Stewart and Anita were twelfth; a man in a green stocking-cap was eleventh. The hillside was steep. Marie negotiated it by running from tree to tree, catching herself, steadying for a second, then down again. Once she fell and rolled a little distance. There was no time to think; perhaps had she thought she would have weakened. She had no real courage, only desperation.

As she reached the track the man in the green stocking-cap was in sight. A minute and a half she had then, not more. She looked about her hastily. A stone might serve her purpose, almost anything that would throw the sled out of its course. She saw a tree branch just above the track and dragged at it frantically. Some one was shouting at her from an upper window of the Russian villa. She did not hear. Stewart and Anita had made the curve above and were

coming down at frantic speed. Marie stood, her back to the oncoming rush of the sled, swaying slightly. When she could hear the singing of the runners she stooped and slid the tree branch out across the track.

She had acted almost by instinct, but with devilish skill. The sled swung to one side up the snowbank, and launched itself into the air. Marie heard the thud and the silence that followed it. Then she turned and scuttled like a hunted thing up the mountain-side.

Peter put in a bad day. Marie was not about, could not be located. Stewart, suffering from concussion, lay insensible all day and all of the night. Peter could find no fracture, but felt it wise to get another opinion. In the afternoon he sent for a doctor from the Kurhaus and learned for the first time that Anita had also been hurt — a broken arm.

"Not serious," said the Kurhaus man. "She is brave, very brave, the young woman. I believe they are engaged?"

Peter said he did not know and thought very hard. Where was Marie? Not gone surely. Here about him lay all her belongings, even her purse.

Toward evening Stewart showed some improvement. He was not conscious, but he

swallowed better and began to toss about. Peter, who had had a long day and very little sleep the night before, began to look jaded. He would have sent for a nurse from the Kurhaus, but he doubted Stewart's ability to stand any extra financial strain, and Peter could not help any.

The time for supper passed, and no Marie. The landlady sent up a tray to Peter, stewed meat and potatoes, a salad, coffee. Peter sat in a corner with his back to Stewart and ate ravenously. He had had nothing since the morning's coffee. After that he sat down again by the bed to watch. There was little to do but watch.

The meal had made him drowsy. He thought longingly of his pipe. Perhaps if he got some fresh air and a smoke! He remembered the balcony.

It was there on the balcony that he found Marie, a cowering thing that pushed his hands away when he would have caught her and broke into passionate crying.

"I cannot! I cannot!"

"Cannot what?" demanded Peter gently, watching her. So near was the balcony rail!

"Throw myself over. I've tried, Peter. I cannot!"

"I should think not!" said Peter sternly.

Just now when we need you, too! Come in and don't be a foolish child."

But Marie would not go in. She held back, clinging tight to Peter's big hand, moaning out in the dialect of the people that always confused him her story of the day, of what she had done, of watching Stewart brought back, of stealing into the house and through an adjacent room to the balcony, of her desperation and her cowardice.

She was numb with cold, exhaustion, and hunger, quite childish, helpless. Peter stood out on the balcony with his arm round her, while the night wind beat about them, and pondered what was best to do. He thought she might come in and care for Stewart, at least, until he was conscious. He could get her some supper.

"How can I?" she asked. "I was seen. They are searching for me now. Oh, Peter! Peter!"

"Who is searching for you? Who saw you?"

"The people in the Russian villa."

"Did they see your face?"

"I wore a veil. I think not."

"Then come in and change your clothes. There is a train down at midnight. You can take it."

"I have no money."

This raised a delicate question. Marie absolutely refused to take Stewart's money. She had almost none of her own. And there were other complications — where was she to go? The family of the injured girl did not suspect her since they did not know of her existence. She might get away without trouble. But after that, what?

Peter pondered this on the balcony, while Marie in the bedroom was changing her clothing, soaked with a day in the snow. He came to the inevitable decision, the decision he knew at the beginning that he was going to make.

"If I could only put it up to Harmony first!" he reflected. "But she will understand when I tell her. She always understands."

Standing there on the little balcony, with tragedy the thickness of a pine board beyond him, Peter experienced a bit of the glow of the morning, as of one who stumbling along in a dark place puts a hand on a friend.

He went into the room. Stewart was lying very still and breathing easily. On her knees beside the bed knelt Marie. At Peter's step she rose and faced him.

"I am leaving him, Peter, for always."

"Good!" said Peter heartily. "Better for you and better for him."

Marie drew a long breath. "The night train,"

she said listlessly, "is an express. I had forgotten. It is double fare."

"What of that, little sister?" said Peter. "What is a double fare when it means life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? And there will be happiness, little sister."

He put his hand in his pocket.

CHAPTER XX

THE Portier was almost happy that morning. For one thing, he had won honorable mention at the Schubert Society the night before; for another, that night the Engel was to sing Mignon, and the Portier had spent his Christmas tips for a ticket. All day long he had been poring over the score.

"'Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühen?'" he sang with feeling while he polished the floors. He polished them with his feet, wearing felt boots for the purpose, and executing in the doing a sort of ungainly dance — a sprinkle of wax, right foot forward and back, left foot forward and back, both feet forward and back in a sort of double shuffle; more wax, more vigorous polishing, more singing, with longer pauses for breath. "'Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom?'" he bellowed — sprinkle of wax, right foot, left foot, any foot at all. Now and then he took the score from his pocket and pored over it, humming the air, raising his eyebrows over the high notes, dropping his chin to the low ones. It was a wonderful morning. Between greetings to

neighbors he sang — a bit of talk, a bit of song.

"'Kennst du das Land' — Good-morning, sir — the old Rax wears a crown. It will snow soon. 'Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen' — Ah, madam the milk Frau, and are the cows frozen up to-day like the pump? No? Marvelous! Dost thou know that to-night is Mignon at the Opera, and that the Engel sings? 'Kennst du das Land' — "

At eleven came Rosa with her husband, the soldier from Salzburg with one lung. He was having a holiday from his sentry duty at the hospital, and the one lung seemed to be a libel, for while the women had coffee together and a bit of mackerel he sang a very fair bass to the Portier's tenor. Together they pored over the score, and even on their way to the beer hall hummed together such bits as they recalled.

On one point they differed. The score was old and soiled with much thumbing. At one point, destroyed long since, the sentry sang A sharp: the Portier insisted on A natural. They argued together over three Steins of beer; the waiter, referred to, decided for A flat. It was a serious matter to have one's teeth set, as one may say, for a natural and then to be shocked with an unexpected half-tone up or down! It destroyed the illusion; it disappointed; it hurt.

The sentry stuck to the sharp — it was sung so at the Salzburg opera. The Portier snapped his thumb at the Salzburg opera. Things were looking serious; they walked back to the lodge in silence. The sentry coughed. Possibly there was something, after all, in the one-lung rumor.

It was then that the Portier remembered Harmony. She would know; perhaps she had the score.

Harmony was having a bad morning. She had slept little until dawn, and Peter's stealthy closing of the outer door had wakened her by its very caution. After that there had been no more sleep. She had sat up in bed with her chin in her hands and thought.

In the pitiless dawn, with no Peter to restore her to cheerfulness, things looked black, indeed. To what had she fallen, that first one man and then another must propose marriage to her to save her. To save her from what? From what people thought, or — each from the other? Were men so evil that they never trusted each other? McLean had frankly distrusted Peter, had said so. Or could it be that there was something about her, something light and frivolous? She had been frivolous. She always laughed at Peter's foolishnesses. Perhaps that was it. That *was* it. They were afraid for her. She had

thrown herself on Peter's hands — almost into his arms. She had made this situation.

She must get away, of course. If only she had some one to care for Jimmy until Peter returned! But there was no one. The Portier's wife was fond of Jimmy, but not skillful. And suppose he were to wake in the night and call for her and she would not come. She cried a little over this. After a time she pattered across the room in her bare feet and got from a bureau drawer the money she had left. There was not half enough to take her home. She could write; the little mother might get some for her, but at infinite cost, infinite humiliation. That would have to be a final, desperate resort.

She felt a little more cheerful when she had had a cup of coffee. Jimmy wakened about that time, and she went through the details of his morning toilet with all the brightness she could assume — bath blankets, warm bath, toenails, finger-nails, fresh nightgown, fresh sheets, and — final touch of all — a real barber's part straight from crown to brow. After that ten minutes under extra comforters while the room aired.

She hung over the boy that morning in an agony of tenderness — he was so little, so frail, and she must leave him. Only one thing sustained her. The boy loved her, but it was Peter

he idolized. When he had Peter he needed nothing else. In some curious process of his childish mind Peter and Daddy mingled in inextricable confusion. More than once he had recalled events in the roving life he and his father had led.

"You remember that, don't you?" he would say.

"Certainly I remember," Peter would reply heartily.

"That evening on the steamer when I ate so many raisins."

"Of course. And were ill."

"Not ill — not that time. But you said I'd make a good pudding! You remember that, don't you?"

And Peter would recall it all.

Peter would be left. That was the girl's comfort.

She made a beginning at gathering her things together that morning, while the boy dozed and the white mice scurried about the little cage. She could not take her trunk, or Peter would trace it. She would have to carry her belongings, a few at a time, to wherever she found a room. Then when Peter came back she could slip away and he would never find her.

At noon came the Portier and the sentry, now no longer friends, and rang the doorbell.

Harmony was rather startled. McLean and Mrs. Boyer had been her only callers, and she did not wish to see either of them. But after a second ring she gathered her courage in her hands and opened the door.

She turned pale when she saw the sentry in his belted blue-gray tunic and high cap. She thought, of course, that Jimmy had been traced and that now he would be taken away. If the sentry knew her, however, he kept his face impassive and merely touched his cap. The Portier stated their errand. Harmony's face cleared. She even smiled as the Portier extended to her the thumbed score with its missing corner. What, after all, does it matter which was right — whether it was A sharp or A natural? What really matters is that Harmony, having settled the dispute and clinched the decision by running over the score for a page or two, turned to find the Portier, ecstatic eyes upturned, hands folded on paunch, enjoying a delirium of pleasure, and the sentry nowhere in sight.

He was discovered a moment later in the doorway of Jimmy's room, where, taciturn as ever, severe, martial, he stood at attention, shoulders back, arms at his sides, thumbs in. In this position he was making, with amazing rapidity, a series of hideous grimaces for the benefit of the little boy in the bed: marvelous

faces they were, in which nose, mouth, and eyes seemed interchangeable, where features played leapfrog with one another. When all was over — perhaps when his repertoire was exhausted — the sentry returned his nose to the center of his face, replaced eyes and mouth, and wiped the ensemble with a blue cotton handkerchief. Then, still in silence, he saluted and withdrew, leaving the youngster enraptured, staring at the doorway.

Harmony had decided the approximate location of her room. In the higher part of the city, in the sixteenth district, there were many unpretentious buildings. She had hunted board there and she knew. It was far from the Stadt far from the fashionable part of town, a neighborhood of small shops, of frank indigence. There surely she could find a room, and perhaps in one of the small stores what she failed to secure in the larger, a position.

Rosa having taken her soldier away, Harmony secured the Portier's wife to sit with Jimmy and spent two hours that afternoon looking about for a room. She succeeded finally in finding one, a small and wretchedly furnished bedroom, part of the suite of a cheap dressmaker. The approach was forbidding enough. One entered a cavelike, cobble-paved court

under the building, filled with wagons, feeding horses, quarrelsome and swearing teamsters. From the side a stone staircase took off and led, twisting from one landing cave to another, to the upper floor.

Here lived the dressmaker, amid the constant whirring of sewing-machines, the Babel of work-people. Harmony, seeking not a home but a hiding-place, took the room at once. She was asked for no reference. In a sort of agony lest this haven fail her she paid for a week in advance. The wooden bed, the cracked mirror over the table, even the pigeons outside on the window-sill were hers for a week.

The dressmaker was friendly, almost garrulous.

"I will have it cleaned," she explained. "I have been so busy: the masquerade season is on. The Fräulein is American, is she not?"

"Yes."

"One knows the Americans. They are chic, not like the English. I have some American customers."

Harmony started. The dressmaker was shrewd. Many people hid in the sixteenth district. She hastened to reassure the girl.

"They will not disturb you. And just now I have but one, a dancer. I shall have the room cleaned. Good-bye, Fräulein."

So far, good. She had a refuge now, one spot that the venom of scandal could not poison, where she could study and work — work hard, although there could be no more lessons — one spot where Peter would not have to protect her, where Peter, indeed, would never find her. This thought, which should have brought comfort, brought only new misery. Peace seemed dearly bought all at once; shabby, wholesome, hearty Peter, with his rough hair and quiet voice, his bulging pockets and steady eyes — she was leaving Peter forever, exchanging his companionship for that of a row of pigeons on a window-sill. He would find some one, of course; but who would know that he liked toast made hard and plenty of butter, or to leave his bed-clothing loose at the foot, Peter being very long and apt to lop over? The lopping over brought a tear or two. A very teary and tragic young heroine, this Harmony, prone to go about for the last day or two with a damp little handkerchief tucked in her sleeve.

She felt her way down the staircase and into the cave below. Fate hangs by a very slender thread sometimes. If a wagon had not lumbered by as she reached the lowest step, so that she must wait and thus had time to lower her veil, she would have been recognized at once by the little Georgiev, waiting to ascend. But the

wagon was there, Harmony lowered her veil, the little Georgiev, passing a veiled young woman in the gloom, went up the staircase with even pulses and calm and judicial bearing, up to the tiny room a floor or two below Harmony's, where he wrote reports to the Minister of War and mixed them with sonnets — to Harmony.

Harmony went back to the Siebensternstrasse, having accomplished what she had set out to do and being very wretched in consequence. Because she was leaving the boy so soon she strove to atone for her coming defection by making it a gala evening. The child was very happy. She tucked him up in the salon, lighted all the candles, served him the daintiest of suppers there. She brought in the mice and tied tiny bows on their necks; she played checkers with him while the supper dishes waited, and went down to defeat in three hilarious games; and last of all she played to him, joyous music at first, then slower, drowsier airs, until his heavy head dropped on his shoulder and she gathered him up in tender arms and carried him to bed.

It was dawn when Marie arrived. Harmony was sleeping soundly when the bell rang. Her first thought was that Peter had come back — but Peter carried a key. The bell rang again,

and she slipped on the old kimono and went to the door.

"Is it Peter?" she called, hand on knob.

"I come from Peter. I have a letter," in German.

"Who is it?"

"You do not know me — Marie Jedlicka. Please let me come in."

Bewildered, Harmony opened the door, and like a gray ghost Marie slipped by her and into the hall.

There was a gaslight burning very low; Harmony turned it up and faced her visitor. She recognized her at once — the girl Dr. Stewart had been with in the coffee-house.

"Something has happened to Peter!"

"No. He is well. He sent this to the Fräulein Wells."

"I am the Fräulein Wells."

Marie held out the letter and staggered. Harmony put her in a chair; she was bewildered, almost frightened. Crisis of some sort was written on Marie's face. Harmony felt very young, very incapable. The other girl refused coffee, would not even go into the salon until Peter's letter had been read. She was a fugitive, a criminal; the Austrian law is severe to those that harbor criminals. Let Harmony read: —

"DEAR HARRY, — Will you forgive me for this and spread the wings of your splendid charity over this poor child? Perhaps I am doing wrong in sending her to you, but just now it is all I can think of. If she wants to talk let her talk. It will probably help her. Also feed her, will you? And if she cannot sleep, give her one of the blue powders I fixed for Jimmy. I'll be back late to-day if I can make it. "PETER."

Harmony glanced up from the letter. Marie sat drooping in her chair. Her eyes were sunken in her head. She had recognized her at once, but any surprise she may have felt at finding Harmony in Peter's apartment was sunk in a general apathy, a compound of nervous reaction and fatigue. During the long hours in the express she had worn herself out with fright and remorse: there was nothing left now but exhaustion.

Harmony was bewildered, but obedient. She went back to the cold kitchen and lighted a fire. She made Marie as comfortable as she could in the salon, and then went into her room to dress. There she read the letter again, and wondered if Peter had gone through life like this, picking up waifs and strays and shouldering their burdens for them. Decidedly, life with Peter was full of surprises.

She remembered, as she hurried into her clothes, the boys' club back in America and the spelling-matches. Decidedly, also, Peter was an occupation, a state of mind, a career. No musician, hoping for a career of her own, could possibly marry Peter.

That was a curious morning in the old lodge of Maria Theresa, while Stewart in the Pension Waldheim struggled back to consciousness, while Peter sat beside him and figured on an old envelope the problem of dividing among four enough money to support one, while McLean ate his heart out in wretchedness in his hotel.

Marie told her story over the early breakfast, sitting with her thin elbows on the table, her pointed chin in her palms.

"And now I am sorry," she finished. "It has done no good. If it had only killed her — but she was not much hurt. I saw her rise and bend over him."

Harmony was silent. She had no stock of aphorisms for the situation, no worldly knowledge, only pity.

"Did Peter say he would recover?"

"Yes. They will both recover and go to America. And he will marry her."

Perhaps Harmony would have been less comfortable, Marie less frank, had Marie realized

that this establishment of Peter's was not on the same basis as Stewart's had been, or had Harmony divined her thought.

The presence of the boy was discovered by his waking. Marie was taken in and presented. She looked stupefied. Certainly the Americans were a marvelous people — to have taken into their house and their hearts this strange child — if he *were* strange. Marie's suspicious little slum mind was not certain.

In the safety and comfort of the little apartment the Viennese expanded, cheered. She devoted herself to the boy, telling him strange folk tales, singing snatches of songs for him. The youngster took a liking to her at once. It seemed to Harmony, going about her morning routine, that Marie was her solution and Peter's.

During the afternoon she took a package to the branch post-office and mailed it by parcel-post to the Wollbadgasse. On the way she met Mrs. Boyer face to face. That lady looked severely ahead, and Harmony passed her with her chin well up and the eyes of a wounded animal.

McLean sent a great box of flowers that day. She put them, for lack of a vase, in a pitcher beside Jimmy's bed.

At dusk a telegram came to say that Stewart was better and that Peter was on his way down to Vienna. He would arrive at eight. Time was very short now — seconds flashed by, minutes galloped. Harmony stewed a chicken for supper, and creamed the breast for Jimmy. She fixed the table, flowers in the center, the best cloth, Peter's favorite cheese. Six o'clock, six-thirty, seven; Marie was telling Jimmy a fairy tale and making the fairies out of rosebuds. The study-lamp was lighted, the stove glowing, Peter's slippers were out, his old smoking-coat, his pipe.

A quarter past seven. Peter would be near Vienna now and hungry. If he could only eat his supper before he learned — but that was impossible. He would come in, as he always did, and slam the outer door, and open it again to close it gently, as he always did, and then he would look for her, going from room to room until he found her — only to-night he would not find her.

She did not say good-bye to Jimmy. She stood in the doorway and said a little prayer for him. Marie had made the flower fairies on needles, and they stood about his head on the pillow — pink and yellow and white elves with fluffy skirts. Then, very silently, she put on her hat and jacket and closed the outer door

behind her. In the courtyard she turned and looked up. The great chandelier in the salon was not lighted, but from the casement windows shone out the comfortable glow of Peter's lamp.

CHAPTER XXI

PETER had had many things to think over during the ride down the mountains. He had the third-class compartment to himself, and sat in a corner, soft hat over his eyes. Life had never been particularly simple to Peter — his own life, yes; a matter of three meals a day — he had had fewer — a roof, clothing. But other lives had always touched him closely, and at the contact points Peter glowed, fused, amalgamated. Thus he had been many people — good, indifferent, bad, but all needy. Thus, also, Peter had committed vicarious crimes, suffered vicarious illnesses, starved, died, loved — vicariously.

And now, after years of living for others, Peter was living at last for himself — and suffering.

Not that he understood exactly what ailed him. He thought he was tired, which was true enough, having had little sleep for two or three nights. Also he explained to himself that he was smoking too much, and resolutely — lighted another cigarette.

Two things had revealed Peter's condition

to himself: McLean had said: "You are crazy in love with her." McLean's statement, lacking subtlety, had had a certain quality of directness. Even then Peter, utterly miserable, had refused to capitulate, when to capitulate would have meant the surrender of the house in the Siebensternstrasse. And the absence from Harmony had shown him just where he stood.

He was in love, crazy in love. Every fiber of his long body glowed with it, ached with it. And every atom of his reason told him what mad folly it was, this love. Even if Harmony cared — and at the mere thought his heart pounded — what madness for her, what idiocy for him! To ask her to accept the half of — nothing, to give up a career to share his struggle for one, to ask her to bury her splendid talent and her beauty under a bushel that he might wave aloft his feeble light!

And there was no way out, no royal road to fortune by the route he had chosen; nothing but grinding work, with a result problematical and years ahead. There were even no legacies to expect, he thought whimsically. Peter had known a chap once, struggling along in gynecology, who had had a fortune left him by a G. P., which being interpreted is Grateful Patient. Peter's patients had a way of living, and when they did drop out, as happened now and then,

had also a way of leaving Peter an unpaid bill in token of appreciation; Peter had even occasionally helped to bury them, by way, he defended himself, of covering up his mistakes.

Peter, sitting back in his corner, allowed the wonderful scenery to slip by unnoticed. He put Harmony the Desirable out of his mind, and took to calculating on a scrap of paper what could be done for Harmony the Musician. He could hold out for three months, he calculated, and still have enough to send Harmony home and to get home himself on a slow boat. The Canadian lines were cheap. If Jimmy lived perhaps he could take him along: if not —

He would have to put six months' work in the next three. That was not so hard. He had got along before with less sleep, and thrived on it. Also there must be no more idle evenings, with Jimmy in the salon propped in a chair and Harmony playing, the room dark save for the glow from the stove and for the one candle at Harmony's elbow.

All roads lead to Rome. Peter's thoughts, having traveled in a circle, were back again to Harmony the Desirable — Harmony playing in the firelight, Harmony flushed over the brick stove, Harmony paring potatoes that night in the kitchen when he — Harmony! Harmony!

Stewart knew all about the accident and its cause. Peter had surmised as much when the injured man failed to ask for Marie.

He tested him finally by bringing Marie's name into the conversation. Stewart ignored it, accepted her absence, refused to be drawn.

That was at first. During the day, however, as he gained strength, he grew restless and uneasy. As the time approached for Peter to leave, he was clearly struggling with himself. The landlady had agreed to care for him and was bustling about the room. During one of her absences he turned to Peter.

"I suppose Marie has n't been round?"

"She came back last night."

"Did she tell you?"

"Yes, poor child."

"She's a devil!" Stewart said, and lay silent. Then: "I saw her shoot that thing out in front of us, but there was no time — Where is she now?"

"Marie? I sent her to Vienna."

Stewart fell back, relieved, not even curious.

"Thank Heaven for that!" he said. "I don't want to see her again. I 'd do something I 'd be sorry for. The kindest thing to say for her is that she was not sane."

"No," said Peter gravely, "she was hardly sane."

Stewart caught his steady gaze and glanced away. For him Marie's little tragedy had been written and erased. He would forget it magnanimously. He had divided what he had with her, and she had repaid him by attempting his life. And not only his life, but Anita's. Peter followed his line of reasoning easily.

"It's quite a frequent complication, Stewart," he said, "but every man to whom it happens regards himself more or less as a victim. She fell in love with you, that's all. Her conduct is contrary to the ethics of the game, but she's been playing poor cards all along."

"Where is she?"

"That doesn't matter, does it?"

Stewart had lain back and closed his eyes. No, it didn't matter. A sense of great relief overwhelmed him. Marie was gone, frightened into hiding. It was as if a band that had been about him was suddenly loosed: he breathed deep, he threw out his arms and laughed from sheer reaction. Then, catching Peter's not particularly approving eyes, he colored.

"Good Lord, Peter!" he said, "you don't know what I've gone through with that little devil. And now she's gone!" He glanced round the disordered room, where bandages and medicines crowded toilet articles on the dressing-table, where one of Marie's small slippers

still lay where it had fallen under the foot of the bed, where her rosary still hung over the corner of the table. "Ring for the maid, Peter, will you! I've got to get this junk out of here. Some of Anita's people may come."

During that afternoon ride, while the train clump-clumped down the mountains, Peter thought of all this. Some of Marie's "junk" was in his bag; her rosary lay in his breast-pocket, along with the pin he had sent her at Christmas. Peter happened on it, still in its box, which looked as if it had been cried over. He had brought it with him. He admired it very much, and it had cost money he could ill afford to spend.

It was late when the train drew into the station. Peter, encumbered with Marie's luggage and his own, lowered his window and added his voice to the chorus of plaintive calls: "Portier! Portier!" they shouted. "Portier!" bawled Peter.

He was obliged to resort to the extravagance of a taxicab. Possibly a fiacre would have done as well, but it cost almost as much and was slower. Moments counted now: a second was an hour, an hour a decade. For he was on his way to Harmony. Extravagance became recklessness. As soon die for a sheep as a lamb! He stopped the taxicab and bought a bunch of

violets, stopped again and bought lilies of the valley to combine with the violets, went out of his way to the American grocery and bought a jar of preserved fruit.

By that time he was laden. The jar of preserves hung in one shabby pocket, Marie's rosary dangled from another; the violets were buttoned under his overcoat against the cold.

At the very last he held the taxi an extra moment and darted into the delicatessen shop across the Siebensternstrasse. From there, standing inside the doorway, he could see the lights in the salon across the way, the glow of his lamp, the flicker that was the fire. Peter whistled, stamped his cold feet, quite neglected — in spite of repeated warnings from Harmony — to watch the Herr Schenkenkaufer weigh the cheese, accepted without a glance a ten-Kronen piece with a hole in it.

"And how is the child to-day?" asked the Herr Schenkenkaufer, covering the defective gold piece with conversation.

"I do not know; I have been away," said Peter. He almost sang it.

"All is well or I would have heard. Wilhelm the Portier was but just now here."

"All well, of course," sang Peter, eyes on the comfortable glow of his lamp, the flicker that

was the fire. "Auf wiedersehen, Herr Schenkenkaufer."

"Auf wiedersehen, Herr Doktor."

Violets, lilies-of-the-valley, cheese, rosary, luggage — thus Peter climbed the stairs. The Portier wished to assist him, but Peter declined. The Portier was noisy. There was to be a moment when Peter, having admitted himself with extreme caution, would present himself without so much as a creak to betray him, would stand in a doorway until some one, Harmony perhaps — ah, Peter! — would turn and see him. She had a way of putting one slender hand over her heart when she was startled.

Peter put down the jar of preserved peaches outside. It was to be a second surprise. Also he put down the flowers; they were to be brought in last of all. One surprise after another is a cumulative happiness. Peter did not wish to swallow all his cake in one bite.

For once he did not slam the outer door, although he very nearly did, and only caught it at the cost of a bruised finger. Inside he listened. There was no clatter of dishes, no scurrying back and forth from table to stove in the final excitement of dishing up. There was, however, a highly agreeable odor of stewing chicken, a crisp smell of baking biscuit.

In the darkened hall Peter had to pause to

steady himself. For he had a sudden mad impulse to shout Harmony's name, to hold out his arms, to call her to him there in the warm darkness, and when she had come, to catch her to him, to tell his love in one long embrace, his arms about her, his rough cheek against her soft one. No wonder he grew somewhat dizzy and had to pull himself together.

The silence rather surprised him, until he recalled that Harmony was probably sewing in the salon, as she did sometimes when dinner was ready to serve. The boy was asleep, no doubt. He stole along on tiptoe, hardly breathing, to the first doorway, which was Jimmy's.

Jimmy was asleep. Round him were the pink and yellow and white flower fairies with violet heads. Peter saw them and smiled. Then, his eyes growing accustomed to the light, he saw Marie, face down on the floor, her head on her arms. Still as she was, Peter knew she was not sleeping, only fighting her battle over again and losing.

Some of the joyousness of his return fled from Peter, never to come back. The two silent figures were too close to tragedy. Peter, with a long breath, stole past the door and on to the salon. No Harmony there, but the great room was warm and cheery. The table was drawn

near the stove and laid for Abendessen. The white porcelain coffee-pot had boiled and extinguished itself, according to its method, and now gently steamed.

On to the kitchen. Much odor of food here, two candles lighted but burning low, a small platter with money on it, quite a little money — almost all he had left Harmony when he went away.

Peter was dazed at first. Even when Marie, hastily summoned, had discovered that Harmony's clothing was gone, when a search of the rooms revealed the absence of her violin and her music, when at last the fact stared them, incontestable, in the face, Peter refused to accept it. He sat for a half-hour or even more by the fire in the salon, obstinately refusing to believe she was gone, keeping the supper warm against her return. He did not think or reason; he sat and waited, saying nothing, hardly moving, save when a gust of wind slammed the garden gate. Then he was all alive, sat erect, ears straining for her hand on the knob of the outer door.

The numbness of the shock passed at last, to be succeeded by alarm. During all the time that followed, that condition persisted, fright, almost terror. Harmony alone in the city,

helpless, dependent, poverty-stricken. Harmony seeking employment under conditions Peter knew too well. But with his alarm came rage.

Marie had never seen Peter angry. She shrank from this gaunt and gray-faced man who raved up and down the salon, questioning the frightened Portier, swearing fierce oaths, bringing accusation after accusation against some unnamed woman to whom he applied epithets that Marie's English luckily did not comprehend. Not a particularly heroic figure was Peter that night: a frantic, disheveled individual, before whom the Portier cowered, who struggled back to sanity through a berserk haze and was liable to swift relapses into fury again.

To this succeeded at last the mental condition that was to be Peter's for many days, hopelessness and alarm and a grim determination to keep on searching.

There were no clues. The Portier made inquiries of all the cabstands in the neighborhood. Harmony had not taken a cab. The delicatessen seller had seen her go out that afternoon with a bundle and return without it. She had been gone only an hour or so. That gave Peter a ray of hope that she might have found a haven in the neighborhood — until he recalled the parcel-post.

One possibility he clung to: Mrs. Boyer had made the mischief, but she had also offered the girl a home. She might be at the Boyers'. Peter, flinging on a hat and without his overcoat, went to the Boyers'. Time was valuable, and he had wasted an hour, two hours, in useless rage. So he took a taxicab, and being by this time utterly reckless of cost let it stand while he interviewed the Boyers.

Boyer himself, partially undressed, opened the door to his ring. Peter was past explanation or ceremonial.

"Is Harmony here?" he demanded.

"Harmony?"

"Harmony Wells. She's disappeared, missing."

"Come in," said Boyer, alive to the strain in Peter's voice. "I don't know, I haven't heard anything. I'll ask Mrs. Boyer."

During the interval it took for a whispered colloquy in the bedroom, and for Mrs. Boyer to don her flannel wrapper, Peter suffered the tortures of the damned. Whatever Mrs. Boyer had meant to say by way of protest at the intrusion on the sacred privacy of eleven o'clock and bedtime died in her throat. Her plump and terraced chin shook with agitation, perhaps with guilt. Peter, however, had got himself in hand. He told a quiet story; Boyer listened:

Mrs. Boyer, clutching her wrapper about her unstayed figure, listened.

"I thought," finished Peter, "that since you had offered her a refuge — from me — she might have come here."

"I offered her a refuge — before I had been to the Pension Schwarz."

"Ah!" said Peter slowly. "And what about the Pension Schwarz?"

"Need you ask? I learned that you were all put out there. I am obliged to say, Dr. Byrne, that under the circumstances had the girl come here I could hardly — Frank, I will speak! — I could hardly have taken her in."

Peter went white and ducked as from a physical blow, stumbling out into the hall again. There he thought of something to say in reply, repudiation, thought better of it, started down the stairs.

Boyer followed him helplessly. At the street door, however, he put his hand on Peter's shoulder. "You know, old man, I don't believe that. These women —"

"I know," said Peter simply. "Thank you. Good-night."

CHAPTER XXII

HARMONY'S only thought had been flight, from Peter, from McLean, from Mrs. Boyer. She had devoted all her energies to losing herself, to cutting the threads that bound her to the life in the Siebensternstrasse. She had drawn all her money, as Peter discovered later. The discovery caused him even more acute anxiety. The city was full of thieves; poverty and its companion, crime, lurked on every shadowy staircase of the barracklike houses, or peered, red-eyed, from every alleyway.

And into this city of contrasts — of gray women of the night hugging gratings for warmth and accosting passers-by with loathsome gestures, of smug civilians hiding sensuous mouths under great mustaches, of dapper soldiers to whom the young girl unattended was potential prey, into this night city of terror, this day city of frightful contrasts, ermine rubbing elbows with frost-nipped flesh, destitution sauntering along the fashionable Prater for lack of shelter, gilt wheels of royalty and yellow wheels of

courtesans — Harmony had ventured alone for the second time.

And this time there was no Peter Byrne to accost her cheerily in the twilight and win her by sheer friendliness. She was alone. Her funds were lower, much lower. And something else had gone — her faith. Mrs. Boyer had seen to that. In the autumn Harmony had faced the city clear-eyed and unafraid; now she feared it, met it with averted eyes, alas! understood it.

It was not the Harmony who had bade a brave farewell to Scatchy and the Big Soprano in the station who fled to her refuge on the upper floor of the house in the Wollbadgasse. This was a hunted creature, alternately flushed and pale, who locked her door behind her before she took off her hat, and who, having taken off her hat and surveyed her hiding-place with tragic eyes, fell suddenly to trembling, alone there in the gaslight.

She had had no plans beyond flight. She had meant, once alone, to think the thing out. But the room was cold, she had had nothing to eat, and the single slovenly maid was a Hungarian and spoke no German. The dressmaker had gone to the Ronacher. Harmony did not know where to find a restaurant, was afraid to trust herself to the streets alone. She went to bed supperless, with a tiny picture of Peter

and Jimmy and the wooden sentry under her cheek.

The pigeons, cooing on the window-sill, wakened her early. She was confused at first, got up to see if Jimmy had thrown off his blankets, and wakened to full consciousness with the sickening realization that Jimmy was not there.

The dressmaker, whose name was Monia Reiff, slept late after her evening out. Harmony, collapsing with hunger and faintness, waited as long as she could. Then she put on her things desperately and ventured out. Surely at this hour Peter would not be searching, and even if he were he would never think of the sixteenth district. He would make inquiries, of course — the Pension Schwarz, Boyers', the master's.

The breakfast brought back her strength and the morning air gave her confidence. The district, too, was less formidable than the neighborhood of the Kärntnerstrasse and the Graben. The shops were smaller. The windows exhibited cheaper goods. There was a sort of family atmosphere about many of them; the head of the establishment in the doorway, the wife at the cashier's desk, daughters, cousins, nieces behind the wooden counters. The shopkeepers were approachable, instead of familiar. Harmony met no rebuffs, was respectfully greeted

and cheerfully listened to. In many cases the application ended in a general consultation, shopkeeper, wife, daughters, nieces, slim clerks with tiny mustaches. She got addresses, followed them up, more consultations, more addresses, but no work. The reason dawned on her after a day of tramping, during which she kept carefully away from that part of the city where Peter might be searching for her.

The fact was, of course, that her knowledge of English was her sole asset as a clerk. And there were few English and no tourists in the sixteenth district. She was marketing a commodity for which there was no demand.

She lunched at a Konditorei, more to rest her tired body than because she needed food. The afternoon was as the morning. At six o'clock, long after the midwinter darkness had fallen, she stumbled back to the Wollbadgasse and up the whitewashed staircase.

She had a shock at the second landing. A man had stepped into the angle to let her pass. A gasjet flared over his head, and she recognized the short heavy figure and ardent eyes of Georgiev. She had her veil down luckily, and he gave no sign of recognition. She passed on, and she heard him a second later descending. But there had been something reminiscent after all in her figure and carriage. The little Georgiev

paused, halfway down, and thought a moment. It was impossible, of course. All women reminded him of the American. Had he not, only the day before, followed for two city blocks a woman old enough to be his mother, merely because she carried a violin case? But there was something about the girl he had just passed — Bah!

A bad week for Harmony followed, a week of weary days and restless nights when she slept only to dream of Peter — of his hurt and incredulous eyes when he found she had gone; of Jimmy — that he needed her, was worse, was dying. More than once she heard him sobbing and wakened to the cooing of the pigeons on the window-sill. She grew thin and sunken-eyed; took to dividing her small hoard, half of it with her, half under the carpet, so that in case of accident all would not be gone.

This, as it happened, was serious. One day, the sixth, she came back wet to the skin from an all-day rain, to find that the carpet bank had been looted. There was no clue. The stolid Hungarian, startled out of her lethargy, protested innocence; the little dressmaker, who seemed honest and friendly, wept in sheer sympathy. The fact remained — half the small hoard was gone.

Two days more, a Sunday and a Monday. On Sunday Harmony played, and Georgiev in the room below, translating into cipher a recent conference between the Austrian Minister of War and the German Ambassador, put aside his work and listened. She played, as once before she had played when life seemed sad and tragic, the "Humoresque." Georgiev, hands behind his head and eyes upturned, was back in the Pension Schwarz that night months ago when Harmony played the "Humoresque" and Peter stooped outside her door. The little Bulgarian sighed and dreamed.

Harmony, a little sadder, a little more forlorn each day, pursued her hopeless quest. She ventured into the heart of the Stadt and paid a part of her remaining money to an employment bureau, to teach English or violin, whichever offered, or even both. After she had paid they told her it would be difficult, almost impossible, without references. She had another narrow escape as she was leaving. She almost collided with Olga, the chambermaid, who, having clashed for the last time with Katrina, was seeking new employment. On another occasion she saw Marie in the crowd and was obsessed with a longing to call to her, to ask for Peter, for Jimmy. That meeting took the heart out of the girl. Marie was white and weary — perhaps the

boy was worse. Perhaps Peter — Her heart contracted. But that was absurd, of course; Peter was always well and strong.

Two things occurred that week, one unexpected, the other inevitable. The unexpected occurrence was that Monia Reiff, finding Harmony being pressed for work, offered the girl a situation. The wage was small, but she could live on it.

The inevitable was that she met Georgiev on the stairs without her veil.

It was the first day in the workroom. The apprentices were carrying home boxes for a ball that night. Thread was needed, and quickly. Harmony, who did odds and ends of sewing, was most easily spared. She slipped on her jacket and hat and ran down to the shop near by.

It was on the return that she met Georgiev coming down. The afternoon was dark and the staircase unlighted. In the gloom one face was as another. Georgiev, listening intently, hearing footsteps, drew back into the embrasure of a window and waited. His swarthy face was tense, expectant. As the steps drew near, were light feminine instead of stealthy, the little spy relaxed somewhat. But still he waited, crouched.

It was a second before he recognized Har-

mony, another instant before he realized his good fortune. She had almost passed. He put out an unsteady hand.

"Fräulein!"

"Herr Georgiev!"

The little Bulgarian was profoundly stirred. His fervid eyes gleamed. He struggled against the barrier of language, broke out in passionate Bulgar, switched to German punctuated with an English word here and there. Made intelligible, it was that he had found her at last. Harmony held her spools of thread and waited for the storm of languages to subside. Then: —

"But you are not to say you have seen me, Herr Georgiev."

"No?"

Harmony colored.

"I am — am hiding," she explained. "Something very uncomfortable happened and I came here. Please don't say you have seen me."

Georgiev was puzzled at first. She had to explain very slowly, with his ardent eyes on her. But he understood at last and agreed of course. His incredulity was turning to certainty. Harmony had actually been in the same building with him while he sought her everywhere else.

"Then," he said at last, "it was you who played Sunday."

"I surely."

She made a move to pass him, but he held out an imploring hand.

"Fräulein, I may see you sometimes?"

"We shall meet again, of course."

"Fräulein, — with all respect, — sometime perhaps you will walk out with me?"

"I am very busy all day."

"At night, then? For the exercise? I, with all respect, Fräulein!"

Harmony was touched.

"Sometime," she consented. And then impulsively: "I am very lonely, Herr Georgiev."

She held out her hand, and the little Bulgarian bent over it and kissed it reverently. The Herr Georgiev's father was a nobleman in his own country, and all the little spy's training had been to make of a girl in Harmony's situation lawful prey. But in the spy's glowing heart there was nothing for Harmony to fear. She knew it. He stood, hat in hand, while she went up the staircase. Then: —

"Fräulein!" anxiously.

"Yes?"

"Was there below at the entrance a tall man in a green velours hat?"

"I saw no one there."

"I thank you, Fräulein."

He watched her slender figure ascend, lose

itself in the shadows, listened until she reached the upper floors. Then with a sigh he clapped his hat on his head and made his cautious way down to the street. There was no man in a green velours hat below, but the little spy had an uneasy feeling that eyes watched him, nevertheless. Life was growing complicated for the Herr Georgiev.

Life was pressing very close to Harmony also in those days, a life she had never touched before. She discovered, after a day or two in the workroom, that Monia Reiff's business lay almost altogether among the demi-monde. The sewing-girls, of Marie's type many of them, found in the customers endless topics of conversation. Some things Harmony was spared, much of the talk being in dialect. But a great deal of it she understood, and she learned much that was not spoken. They talked freely of the women, their clothes, and they talked a great deal about a newcomer, an American dancer, for whom Monia was making an elaborate outfit. The American's name was Lillian Le Grande. She was dancing at one of the variety theaters.

Harmony was working on a costume for the Le Grande woman — a gold brocade slashed to the knee at one side and with a fragment of bodice made of gilt tissue. On the day after her encounter with Georgiev she met her.

There was a dispute over the gown, something about the draping. Monia, flushed with irritation, came to the workroom door and glanced over the girls. She singled out Harmony finally and called her.

"Come and put on the American's gown," she ordered. "She wishes — Heaven knows what she wishes!"

Harmony went unwillingly. Nothing she had heard of the Fräulein Le Grande had prepossessed her. Her uneasiness was increased when she found herself obliged to shed her gown and to stand for one terrible moment before the little dressmaker's amused eyes.

"Thou art very lovely, very chic," said Monia. The dress added to rather than relieved Harmony's discomfiture. She donned it in one of the fitting-rooms, made by the simple expedient of curtaining off a corner of the large reception room. The slashed skirt embarrassed her; the low cut made her shrink. Monia was frankly entranced. Above the gold tissue of the bodice rose Harmony's exquisite shoulders. Her hair was gold; even her eyes looked golden. The dressmaker, who worshiped beauty, gave a pull here, a pat there. If only all women were so beautiful in the things she made!

She had an eye for the theatrical also. She posed Harmony behind the curtain, arranged

lights, drew down the chiffon so that a bit more of the girl's rounded bosom was revealed. Then she drew the curtain aside and stood smiling.

Le Grande paid the picture the tribute of a second's silence, Then: —

"Exquisite!" she said in English. Then in halting German: "Do not change a line. It is perfect."

Harmony must walk in the gown, turn, sit. Once she caught a glimpse of herself and was startled. She had been wearing black for so long, and now this radiant golden creature was herself. She was enchanted and abashed. The slash in the skirt troubled her: her slender leg had a way of revealing itself.

The ordeal was over at last. The dancer was pleased. She ordered another gown. Harmony, behind the curtain, slipped out of the dress and into her own shabby frock. On the other side of the curtain the dancer was talking. Her voice was loud, but rather agreeable. She smoked a cigarette. Scraps of chatter came to Harmony, and once a laugh.

"That is too pink — something more delicate."

"Here is a shade; hold it to your cheek."

"I am a bad color. I did not sleep last night."

"Still no news, Fräulein?"

"None. He has disappeared utterly. That is n't so bad, is it? I could use more rouge."

"It is being much worn. It is strange, is it not, that a child could be stolen from the hospital and leave no sign!"

The dancer laughed a mirthless laugh. Her voice changed, became nasal, full of venom.

"Oh, they know well enough," she snapped. "Those nurses know, and there 's a pig of a red-bearded doctor — I 'd like to poison him. Separating mother and child! I 'm going to find him, if only to show them they are not so smart after all."

In her anger she had lapsed into English. Harmony, behind her curtain, had clutched at her heart. Jimmy's mother!

CHAPTER XXIII

JIMMY was not so well, although Harmony's flight had had nothing to do with the relapse. He had found Marie a slavishly devoted sub stitute, and besides Peter had indicated that Harmony's absence was purely temporary. But the breaking-up was inevitable. All day long the child lay in the white bed, apathetic but sleepless. In vain Marie made flower fairies for his pillow, in vain the little mice, now quite tame, played hide-and-seek over the bed, in vain Peter paused long enough in his frantic search for Harmony to buy colored postcards and bring them to him.

He was contented enough; he did not suffer at all; and he had no apprehension of what was coming. He asked for nothing, tried obediently to eat, liked to have Marie in the room. But he did not beg to be taken into the salon, as he once had done. There was a sort of mental confusion also. He liked Marie to read his father's letters; but as he grew weaker the occasional confusing of Peter with his dead father became a fixed idea. Peter was Daddy.

Peter took care of him at night. He had

moved into Harmony's adjacent room and dressed there. But he had never slept in the bed. At night he put on his shabby dressing-gown and worn slippers and lay on a haircloth sofa at the foot of Jimmy's bed — lay but hardly slept, so afraid was he that the slender thread of life might snap when it was drawn out to its slenderest during the darkest hours before the dawn. More than once in every night Peter rose and stood, hardly breathing, with the tiny lamp in his hand, watching for the rise and fall of the boy's thin little chest. Peter grew old these days. He turned gray over the ears and developed lines about his mouth that never left him again. He felt gray and old, and sometimes bitter and hard also. The boy's condition could not be helped: it was inevitable, hopeless. But the thing that was eating his heart out had been unnecessary and cruel.

Where was Harmony? When it stormed, as it did almost steadily, he wondered how she was sheltered; when the occasional sun shone he hoped it was bringing her a bit of cheer. Now and then, in the night, when the lamp burned low and gusts of wind shook the old house, fearful thoughts came to him — the canal, with its filthy depths. Daylight brought reason, however. Harmony had been too rational, too sane for such an end.

McLean was Peter's great support in those terrible days. He was young and hopeful. Also he had money. Peter could not afford to grease the machinery of the police service; McLean could and did. In Berlin Harmony could not have remained hidden for two days. In Vienna, however, it was different. Returns were made to the department, but irregularly. An American music student was missing. There were thousands of American music students in the city: one fell over them in the coffee-houses. McLean offered a reward and followed up innumerable music students.

The alternating hope and despair was most trying. Peter became old and haggard; the boy grew thin and white. But there was this difference, that with Peter the strain was cumulative, hour on hour, day on day. With McLean each night found him worn and exhausted, but each following morning he went to work with renewed strength and energy. Perhaps, after all, the iron had not struck so deep into his soul. With Peter it was a life-and-death matter.

Clinics and lectures had begun again, but he had no heart for work. The little household went on methodically. Marie remained; there had seemed nothing else to do. She cooked Peter's food — what little he would eat: she nursed Jimmy while Peter was out on the long

search; and she kept the apartment neat. She was never intrusive, never talkative. Indeed, she seemed to have lapsed into definite silence. She deferred absolutely to Peter, adored him, indeed, from afar. She never ate with him, in spite of his protests.

The little apartment was very quiet. Where formerly had been music and Harmony's soft laughter, where Anna Gates had been wont to argue with Peter in loud, incisive tones, where even the prisms of the chandelier had once vibrated in response to Harmony's violin, almost absolute silence now reigned. Even the gate, having been repaired, no longer creaked, and the loud altercations between the Portier and his wife had been silenced out of deference to the sick child.

On the day that Harmony, in the gold dress, had discovered Jimmy's mother in the American dancer Peter had had an unusually bad day. McLean had sent him a note by messenger early in the morning, to the effect that a young girl answering Harmony's description had been seen in the park at Schönbrunn and traced to an apartment near by.

Harmony had liked Schönbrunn, and it seemed possible. They had gone out together, McLean optimistic, Peter afraid to hope. And it had been as he feared — a pretty little violin

student, indeed, who had been washing her hair, and only opened the door an inch or two. McLean made a lame apology, Peter too sick with disappointment to speak. Then back to the city again.

He had taken to making a daily round, to the master's, to the Frau Professor Bergmeister's, along the Graben and the Kärntnerstrasse, ending up at the Doctors' Club in the faint hope of a letter. Wrath still smouldered deep in Peter; he would not enter a room at the club if Mrs. Boyer sat within. He had had a long hour with Dr. Jennings, and left that cheerful person writhing in abasement. And he had held a stormy interview with the Frau Schwarz, which left her humble for a week, and exceedingly nervous, being of the impression from Peter's manner that in the event of Harmony not turning up an American gunboat would sail up the right arm of the Danube and bombard the Pension Schwarz.

Schönbrunn having failed them, McLean and Peter went back to the city in the street-car, neither one saying much. Even McLean's elasticity was deserting him. His eyes, from much peering into crowds, had taken on a strained, concentrated look.

Peter was shabbier than ever beside the other man's ultra-fashionable dress. He sat, bent

forward, his long arms dangling between his knees, his head down. Their common trouble had drawn the two together, or had drawn McLean close to Peter, as if he recognized that there were degrees in grief and that Peter had received almost a death-wound. His old rage at Peter had died. Harmony's flight had proved the situation as no amount of protestation would have done. The thing now was to find the girl; then he and Peter would start even, and the battle to the best man.

They had the car almost to themselves. Peter had not spoken since he sat down. McLean was busy over a notebook, in which he jotted down from day to day such details of their search as might be worth keeping. Now and then he glanced at Peter as if he wished to say something, hesitated, fell to work again over the notebook. Finally he ventured.

"How 's the boy?"

"Not so well to-day. I 'm having a couple of men in to see him to-night. He does n't sleep."

"Do you sleep?"

"Not much. He 's on my mind, of course."

That and other things, Peter.

"Don't you think — would n't it be better to have a nurse. You can't go like this all day and be up all night, you know. And Marie has him most of the day." McLean, of course, had

known Marie before. "The boy ought to have a nurse, I think."

"He does n't move without my hearing him."

"That 's an argument for me. Do you want to get sick?"

Peter turned a white face toward McLean, a face in which exasperation struggled with fatigue.

"Good Lord, boy," he rasped, "don't you suppose I 'd have a nurse if I could afford it?"

"Would you let me help? I 'd like to do something. I 'm a useless cub in a sick-room, but I could do that. Who 's the woman he liked in the hospital?"

"Nurse Elisabet. I don't know, Mac. There 's no reason why I should n't let you help, I suppose. It hurts, of course, but — if he would be happier —"

"That 's settled, then," said McLean. "Nurse Elisabet, if she can come. And — look here, old man. I 've been trying to say this for a week and have n't had the nerve. Let me help you out for a while. You can send it back when you get it, any time, a year or ten years. I 'll not miss it."

But Peter refused. He tempered the refusal in his kindly way.

"I can't take anything now," he said. "But I 'll remember it, and if things get very bad I 'll come to you. It is n't costing much to live.

Marie is a good manager, almost as good as — Harmony was." This with difficulty. He found it always hard to speak of Harmony. His throat seemed to close on the name.

That was the best McLean could do, but he made a mental reservation to see Marie that night and slip her a little money. Peter need never know, would never notice.

At a cross-street the car stopped, and the little Bulgarian, Georgiev, got on. He inspected the car carefully before he came in from the platform, and sat down unobtrusively in a corner. Things were not going well with him either. His small black eyes darted from face to face suspiciously, until they came to a rest on Peter.

It was Georgiev's business to read men. Quickly he put together the bits he had gathered from Harmony on the staircase, added to them Peter's despondent attitude, his strained face, the abstraction which required a touch on the arm from his companion when they reached their destination, recalled Peter outside the door of Harmony's room in the Pension Schwarz — and built him a little story that was not far from the truth.

Peter left the car without seeing him. It was the hour of the promenade, when the Ring and the larger business streets were full of people,

when Demel's was thronged with pretty women eating American ices, with military men drinking tea and nibbling Austrian pastry, the hour when the flower women along the Stephansplatz did a rousing business in roses, when sterile women burned candles before the Madonna in the Cathedral, when the lottery did the record business of the day.

It was Peter's forlorn hope that somewhere among the crowd he might happen on Harmony. For some reason he thought of her always as in a crowd, with people close, touching her, men staring at her, following her. He had spent a frightful night in the Opera, scanning seat after seat, not so much because he hoped to find her as because inaction was intolerable.

And so, on that afternoon, he made his slow progress along the Kärntnerstrasse, halting now and then to scrutinize the crowd. He even peered through the doors of shops here and there, hoping while he feared that the girl might be seeking employment within, as she had before in the early days of the winter.

Because of his stature and powerful physique, and perhaps, too, because of the wretchedness in his eyes, people noticed him. There was one place where Peter lingered, where a new building was being erected, and where because of the narrowness of the passage the dense crowd was

thinned as it passed. He stood by choice outside a hairdresser's window, where a brilliant light shone on each face that passed.

Inside the clerks had noticed him. Two of them standing together by the desk spoke of him: "He is there again, the gray man!"

"Ah, so! But, yes, there is his back!"

"Poor one, it is the Fräulein Engel he waits to see, perhaps."

"More likely Le Grande, the American. He is American."

"He is Russian. Look at his size."

"But his shoes!" triumphantly. "They are American, little one."

The third girl had not spoken; she was wrapping in tissue a great golden rose made for the hair. She placed it in a box carefully.

"I think he is of the police," she said, "or a spy. There is much talk of war."

"Foolishness! Does a police officer sigh always? Or a spy have such sadness in his face? And he grows thin and white."

"The rose, Fräulein."

The clerk who had wrapped up the flower held it out to the customer. The customer, however, was not looking. She was gazing with strange intentness at the back of a worn gray overcoat. Then with a curious clutch at her heart she went white. Harmony, of course,

Harmony come to fetch the golden rose that was to complete Le Grande's costume.

She recovered almost at once and made an excuse to leave by another exit.

She took a final look at the gray sleeve that was all she could see of Peter, who had shifted a bit, and stumbled out into the crowd, walking along with her lip trembling under her veil, and with the slow and steady ache at her heart that she had thought she had stilled for good.

It had never occurred to Harmony that Peter loved her. He had proposed to her twice, but that had been in each case to solve a difficulty for her. And once he had taken her in his arms, but that was different. Even then he had not said he loved her — had not even known it, to be exact. Nor had Harmony realized what Peter meant to her until she had put him out of her life.

The sight of the familiar gray coat, the scrap of conversation, so enlightening as to poor Peter's quest, that Peter was growing thin and white, made her almost reel. She had been too occupied with her own position to realize Peter's. With the glimpse of him came a great longing for the house on the Siebensternstrasse, for Jimmy's arms about her neck, for the salon with the lamp lighted and the sleet beating

harmlessly against the casement windows, for the little kitchen with the brick stove, for — Peter.

Doubts of the wisdom of her course assailed her. But to go back meant, at the best, adding to Peter's burden of Jimmy and Marie, meant the old situation again, too, for Marie most certainly did not add to the respectability of the establishment. And other doubts assailed her. What if Jimmy were not so well, should die, as was possible, and she had not let his mother see him!

Monia Reiff was very busy that day. Harmony did not leave the workroom until eight o'clock. During all that time, while her slim fingers worked over fragile laces and soft chiffons, she was seeing Jimmy as she had seen him last, with the flower fairies on his pillow, and Peter, keeping watch over the crowd in the Kärntnerstrasse, looking with his steady eyes for her.

No part of the city was safe for a young girl after night, she knew; the sixteenth district was no better than the rest, rather worse in places. But the longing to see the house on the Siebensternstrasse grew on her, became from an ache a sharp and insistent pain. She must go, must see once again the comfortable glow

of Peter's lamp, the flicker that was the fire.

She ate no supper. She was too tired to eat, and there was the pain. She put on her wraps and crept down the whitewashed staircase. The paved courtyard below was to be crossed and it was poorly lighted. She achieved the street, however, without molestation. To the street-car was only a block, but during that block she was accosted twice. She was white and frightened when she reached the car.

The Siebensternstrasse at last. The street was always dark; the delicatessen shop was closed, but in the wild-game store next a light was burning low, and a flame flickered before the little shrine over the money drawer. The gameseller was a religious man.

The old stucco house dominated the neighborhood. From the time she left the car Harmony saw it, its long flat roof black against the dark sky, its rows of unlighted windows, its long wall broken in the center by the gate. Now from across the street its whole façade lay before her. Peter's lamp was not lighted, but there was a glow of soft firelight from the salon windows. The light was not regular — it disappeared at regular intervals, was blotted out. Harmony knew what that meant. Some one beyond range of where she stood was pacing the floor, back

and forward, back and forward. When he was worried or anxious Peter always paced the floor.

She did not know how long she stood there. One of the soft rains was falling, or more accurately, condensing. The saturated air was hardly cold. She stood on the pavement unmolested, while the glow died lower and lower, until at last it was impossible to trace the pacing figure. No one came to any of the windows. The little lamp before the shrine in the wild-game shop burned itself out; the Portier across the way came to the door, glanced up at the sky and went in. Harmony heard the rattle of the chain as it was stretched across the door inside.

Not all the windows of the suite opened on the street. Jimmy's windows — and Peter's — opened toward the back of the house, where in a brick-paved courtyard the wife of the Portier hung her washing, and where the Portier himself kept a hutch of rabbits. A wild and reckless desire to see at least the light from the child's room possessed Harmony. Even the light would be something; to go like this, to carry with her only the memory of a dark looming house without cheer was unthinkable. The gate was never locked. If she but went into the garden and round by the spruce tree to the back of the house, it would be something.

She knew the garden quite well. Even the

darkness had no horror for her. Little Scatchy had had a habit of leaving various articles on her window-sill and of instigating searches for them at untimely hours of night. Once they had found her hairbrush in the rabbit hutch! So Harmony, ashamed but unalarmed, made her way by the big spruce to the corner of the old lodge and thus to the courtyard.

Ah, this was better! Lights all along the apartment floor and moving shadows; on Jimmy's window-sill a jar of milk. And voices — some one was singing.

Peter was singing, droning softly, as one who puts a drowsy child to sleep. Slower and slower, softer and softer, over and over, the little song Harmony had been wont to sing: —

"Ah well! For us all some sweet hope lies
Deeply buried from human eyes.
And in the — hereafter — angels may
Roll — the — stone — from — its — grave — away."

Slower and slower, softer and softer, until it died away altogether. Peter, in his old dressing-gown, came to the window and turned down the gaslight beside it to a blue point. Harmony did not breathe. For a minute, two minutes, he stood there looking out. Far off the twin clocks of the Votivkirche struck the hour. All about lay the lights of the old city, so very old, so wise, so cunning, so cold.

Peter stood looking out, as he had each night since Harmony went away. Each night he sang the boy to sleep, turned down the light and stood by the window. And each night he whispered to the city that sheltered Harmony somewhere, what he had whispered to the little sweater coat the night before he went away: —

"Good-night, dear. Good-night, Harmony."

The rabbits stirred uneasily in the hutch; a passing gust shook the great tree overhead and sent down a sharp shower on to the bricks below. Peter struck a match and lit his pipe; the flickering light illuminated his face, his rough hair, his steady eyes.

"Good-night, Peter," whispered Harmony. "Good-night, dear."

CHAPTER XXIV

WALTER STEWART had made an uncomplicated recovery, helped along by relief at the turn events had taken. In a few days he was going about again, weak naturally, rather handsomer than before because a little less florid. But the week's confinement had given him an opportunity to think over many things. Peter had set him thinking, on the day when he had packed up the last of Marie's small belongings and sent them down to Vienna.

Stewart, lying in bed, had watched him. "Just how much talk do you suppose this has made, Byrne?" he asked.

"Have n't an idea. Some probably. The people in the Russian villa saw it, you know."

Stewart's brows contracted.

"Damnation! Then the hotel has it, of course!"

"Probably."

Stewart groaned. Peter closed Marie's American trunk of which she had been so proud, and coming over looked down at the injured man.

"Don't you think you 'd better tell the girl all about it?"

"No," doggedly.

"I know, of course, it would n't be easy, but — you can't get away with it, Stewart. That 's one way of looking at it. There 's another."

"What 's that?"

"Starting with a clean slate. If she 's the sort you want to marry, and not a prude, she'll understand, not at first, but after she gets used to it."

"She would n't understand in a thousand years."

"Then you 'd better not marry her. You know, Stewart, I have an idea that women imagine a good many pretty rotten things about us, anyhow. A sensible girl would rather know the truth and be done with it. What a man has done with his life before a girl — the right girl — comes into it is n't a personal injury to her, since she was n't a part of his life then. You know what I mean. But she has a right to know it before she chooses."

"How many would choose under those circumstances?" he jibed.

Peter smiled. "Quite a few," he said cheerfully. "It 's a wrong system, of course; but we can get a little truth out of it."

"You can't get away with it" stuck in Stewart's mind for several days. It was the one thing Peter said that did stick. And before Stewart

had recovered enough to be up and about he had made up his mind to tell Anita. In his mind he made quite a case for himself; he argued the affair against his conscience and came out victorious.

Anita's party had broken up. The winter sports did not compare, they complained, with St. Moritz. They disliked German cooking. Into the bargain the weather was not good; the night's snows turned soft by midday; and the crowds that began to throng the hotels were solid citizens, not the fashionables of the Riviera. Anita's arm forbade her traveling. In the reassembling of the party she went to the Kurhaus in the valley below the pension with one of the women who wished to take the baths.

It was to the Kurhaus, then, that Stewart made his first excursion after the accident. He went to dinner. Part of the chaperon's treatment called for an early retiring hour, which was highly as he had wished it and rather unnerving after all. A man may decide that a dose of poison is the remedy for all his troubles, but he does not approach his hour with any hilarity. Stewart was a stupid dinner guest, ate very little, and looked haggard beyond belief when the hour came for the older woman to leave.

He did not lack courage however. It was his great asset, physical and mental rather than

moral, but courage nevertheless. The evening was quiet, and they elected to sit on the balcony outside Anita's sitting room, the girl swathed in white furs and leaning back in her steamer chair.

Below lay the terrace of the Kurhaus, edged with evergreen trees. Beyond and far below that was the mountain village, a few scattered houses along a frozen stream. The townspeople retired early; light after light was extinguished, until only one in the priest's house remained. A train crept out of one tunnel and into another, like a glowing worm crawling from burrow to burrow.

The girl felt a change in Stewart. During the weeks he had known her there had been a curious restraint in his manner to her. There were times whan an avowal seemed to tremble on his lips, when his eyes looked into hers with the look no woman ever mistakes; the next moment he would glance away, his face would harden. They were miles apart. And perhaps the situation had piqued the girl. Certainly it had lost nothing for her by its unusualness.

To-night there was a difference in the man. His eyes met hers squarely, without evasion, but with a new quality, a searching, perhaps, for something in her to give him courage. The girl had character, more than ordinary

decision. It was what Stewart admired in her most, and the thing, of course, that the little Marie had lacked. Moreover, Anita, barely twenty, was a woman, not a young girl. Her knowledge of the world, not so deep as Marie's, was more comprehensive. Where Marie would have been merciful, Anita would be just, unless she cared for him. In that case she might be less than just, or more.

Anita in daylight was a pretty young woman, rather incisive of speech, very intelligent, having a wit without malice, charming to look at, keenly alive. Anita in the dusk of the balcony, waiting to hear she knew not what, was a judicial white goddess, formidably still, frightfully potential. Stewart, who had embraced many women, did not dare a finger on her arm.

He had decided on a way to tell the girl the story — a preamble about his upbringing, which had been indifferent, his struggle to get to Vienna, his loneliness there, all leading with inevitable steps to Marie. From that, if she did not utterly shrink from him, to his love for her.

It was his big hour, that hour on the balcony. He was reaching, through love, heights of honesty he had never scaled before. But as a matter of fact he reversed utterly his order of procedure. The situation got him, this first evening absolutely alone with her. That and her nearness,

and the pathos of her bandaged, useless arm. Still he had not touched her.

The thing he was trying to do was more difficult for that. General credulity to the contrary, men do not often make spoken love first. How many men propose marriage to their women across the drawing-room or from chair to chair? Absurd! The eyes speak first, then the arms, the lips last. The woman is in his arms before he tells his love. It is by her response that he gauges his chances and speaks of marriage. Actually the thing is already settled; tardy speech only follows on swift instinct. Stewart, wooing as men woo, would have taken the girl's hand, gained an encouragement from it, ventured to kiss it, perhaps, and finding no rebuff would then and there have crushed her to him. What need of words? They would follow in due time, not to make a situation but to clarify it.

But he could not woo as men woo. The barrier of his own weakness stood between them and must be painfully taken down.

"I'm afraid this is stupid for you," said Anita out of the silence. "Would you like to go to the music-room?"

"God forbid. I was thinking."

"Of what?" Encouragement this, surely.

"I was thinking how you had come into my life, and stirred it up."

"Really? I?"

"You know that."

"How did I stir it up?"

"That 's hardly the way I meant to put it. You 've changed everything for me. I care for you — a very great deal."

He was still carefully in hand, his voice steady. And still he did not touch her. Other men had made love to her, but never in this fashion, or was he making love?

"I 'm very glad you like me."

"Like you!" Almost out of hand that time. The thrill in his voice was unmistakable. "It 's much more than that, Anita, so much more that I 'm going to try to do a hideously hard thing. Will you help a little?"

"Yes, if I can." She was stirred, too, and rather frightened.

Stewart drew his chair nearer to her and sat forward, his face set and dogged.

"Have you any idea how you were hurt? Or why?"

"No. There 's a certain proportion of accidents that occur at all these places, is n't there?"

"This was not an accident."

"No?"

"The branch of a tree was thrown out in front of the sled to send us over the bank. It was murder, if intention is crime."

After a brief silence —

"Somebody who wished to kill you, or me?"

"Both of us, I believe. It was done by a woman — a girl, Anita. A girl I had been living with."

A brutal way to tell her, no doubt, but admirably courageous. For he was quivering with dread when he said it — the courage of the man who faces a cannon. And here, where a less-poised woman would have broken into speech, Anita took the refuge of her kind and was silent. Stewart watched her as best he could in the darkness, trying to gather further courage to go on. He could not see her face, but her fingers, touching the edge of the chair, quivered.

"May I tell you the rest?"

"I don't think I want to hear it."

"Are you going to condemn me unheard?"

"There is n't anything you can say against the fact?"

But there was much to say, and sitting there in the darkness he made his plea. He made no attempt to put his case. He told what had happened simply; he told of his loneliness and discomfort. And he emphasized the lack of sentiment that prompted the arrangement.

Anita spoke then for the first time: "And

when you tried to terminate it she attempted to kill you!"

"I was acting the beast. I brought her up here, and then neglected her for you."

"Then it was hardly only a business arrangement for her."

"It was at first. I never dreamed of anything else. I swear that, Anita. But lately, in the last month or two, she — I suppose I should have seen that she —"

"That she had fallen in love with you. How old is she?"

"Nineteen."

A sudden memory came to Anita, of a slim young girl, who had watched her with wide, almost childish eyes.

"Then it was she who was in the compartment with you on the train coming up?"

"Yes."

"Where is she now?"

"In Vienna. I have not heard from her. Byrne, the chap who came up to see me after the — after the accident, sent her away. I think he 's looking after her. I have n't heard from him."

"Why did you tell me all this?"

"Because I love you, Anita. I want you to marry me."

"What! After that?"

"That, or something similar, is in many men's lives. They don't tell it, that 's the difference. I 'm not taking any credit for telling you this. I'm ashamed to the bottom of my soul, and when I look at your bandaged arm I 'm suicidal. Peter Byrne urged me to tell you. He said I could n't get away with it; some time or other it would come out. Then he said something else. He said you'd probably understand, and that if you married me it was better to start with a clean slate."

No love, no passion in the interview now. A clear statement of fact, an offer — his past against hers, his future with hers. Her hand was steady now. The light in the priest's house had been extinguished. The chill of the mountain night penetrated Anita's white furs, and set her — or was it the chill? — to shivering.

"If I had not told you, would you have married me?"

"I think so. I 'll be honest, too. Yes."

"I am the same man you would have married. Only — more honest."

"I cannot argue about it. I am tired and cold."

Stewart glanced across the valley to where the cluster of villas hugged the mountain-side. There was a light in his room; outside was the little balcony where Marie had leaned against

the railing and looked down, down. Some of the arrogance of his new virtue left the man. He was suddenly humbled. For the first time he realized a part of what Marie had endured in that small room where the light burned.

"Poor little Marie!" he said softly.

The involuntary exclamation did more for him than any plea he could have made. Anita rose and held out her hand.

"Go and see her," she said quietly. "You owe her that. We 'll be leaving here in a day or so and I 'll not see you again. But you 've been honest, and I will be honest, too. I —I cared a great deal, too."

"And this has killed it?"

"I hardly comprehend it yet. I shall have to have time to think."

"But if you are going away — I 'm afraid to leave you. You 'll think this thing over, alone, and all the rules of life you 've been taught will come —"

"Please, I *must* think. I will write you, I promise."

He caught her hand and crushed it between both of his.

"I suppose you would rather I did not kiss you?" humbly.

"I do not want you to kiss me."

He released her hand and stood looking down

at her in the darkness. If he could only have crushed her to him, made her feel the security of his love, of his sheltering arms! But the barrier of his own building was between them. His voice was husky.

"I want you to try to remember, past what I have told you, to the thing that concerns us both — I love you. I never loved the other woman. I never pretended I loved her. And there will be nothing more like that."

"I shall try to remember."

Anita left Semmering the next day, against the protests of the doctor and the pleadings of the chaperon. She did not see Stewart again. But before she left, with the luggage gone and the fiacre at the door, she went out on the terrace, and looked across to the Villa Waldheim, rising from among its clustering trees. Although it was too far to be certain, she thought she saw the figure of a man on the little balcony standing with folded arms, gazing across the valley to the Kurhaus.

Having promised to see Marie, Stewart proceeded to carry out his promise in his direct fashion. He left Semmering the evening of the following day, for Vienna. The strain of the confession was over, but he was a victim of sickening dread. To one thing only he dared

to pin his hopes. Anita had said she cared, cared a great deal. And, after all, what else mattered? The story had been a jolt, he told himself. Girls were full of queer ideas of right and wrong, bless them! But she cared. She cared!

He arrived in Vienna at nine o'clock that night. The imminence of his interview with Marie hung over him like a cloud. He ate a hurried supper, and calling up the Doctors' Club by telephone found Peter's address in the Siebensternstrasse. He had no idea, of course, that Marie was there. He wanted to see Peter to learn where Marie had taken refuge, and incidentally to get from Peter a fresh supply of moral courage for the interview. For he needed courage. In vain on the journey down had he clothed himself in armor of wrath against the girl; the very compartment in the train provoked softened memories of her. Here they had bought a luncheon, there Marie had first seen the Rax. Again at this station she had curled up and put her head on his shoulder for a nap. Ah, but again, at this part of the journey he had first seen Anita!

He took a car to the Siebensternstrasse. His idea of Peter's manner of living those days was exceedingly vague. He had respected Peter's reticence, after the manner of men with each

other. Peter had once mentioned a boy he was looking after, in excuse for leaving so soon after the accident. That was all.

The house on the Siebensternstrasse loomed large and unlighted. The street was dark, and it was only after a search that Stewart found the gate. Even then he lost the path, and found himself among a group of trees, to touch the lowest branches of any of which resulted in a shower of raindrops. To add to his discomfort some one was walking in the garden, coming toward him with light, almost stealthy steps.

Stewart by his tree stood still, waiting. The steps approached, were very close, were beside him. So intense was the darkness that even then all he saw was a blacker shadow, and that was visible only because it moved. Then a hand touched his arm, stopped as if paralyzed, drew back slowly, fearfully.

"Good Heavens!" said poor Harmony faintly.

"Please don't be alarmed. I have lost the path." Stewart's voice was almost equally nervous. "Is it to the right or the left?"

It was a moment before Harmony had breath to speak. Then: —

"To the right a dozen paces or so."

"Thank you. Perhaps I can help you to find it."

"I know it quite well. Please don't bother."

The whole situation was so unexpected that only then did it dawn on Stewart that this blacker shadow was a countrywoman speaking God's own language. Together, Harmony a foot or so in advance, they made the path.

"The house is there. Ring hard, the bell is out of order."

"Are you not coming in?"

"No. I — I do not live here."

She must have gone just after that. Stewart, glancing at the dark façade of the house, turned round to find her gone, and a moment later heard the closing of the gate. He was bewildered. What sort of curious place was this, a great looming house that concealed in its garden a fugitive American girl who came and went like a shadow, leaving only the memory of a sweet voice strained with fright?

Stewart was full of his encounter as he took the candle the Portier gave him and followed the gentleman's gruff directions up the staircase. Peter admitted him, looking a trifle uneasy, as well he might with Marie in the salon.

Stewart was too preoccupied to notice Peter's expression. He shook the rain off his hat, smiling.

"How are you?" asked Peter dutifully.

"Pretty good, except for a headache when

I'm tired. What sort of a place have you got here anyhow, Byrne?"

"Old hunting-lodge of Maria Theresa," replied Peter, still preoccupied with Marie and what was coming. "Rather interesting old place."

"Rather," commented Stewart, "with goddesses in the garden and all the usual stunts."

"Goddesses?"

"Ran into one just now among the trees. 'A woman I forswore, but thou being a goddess I forswore not thee.' English-speaking goddess, by George!"

Peter was staring at him incredulously; now he bent forward and grasped his arm in fingers of steel.

"For Heaven's sake, Stewart, tell me what you mean! Who was in the garden?"

Stewart was amused and interested. It was not for him to belittle a situation of his own making, an incident of his own telling.

"I lost my way in your garden, wandered among the trees, broke through a hedgerow or two, struck a match and consulted the compass —"

Peter's fingers closed.

"Quick," he said.

Stewart's manner lost its jauntiness.

"There was a girl there," he said shortly.

"Could n't see her. She spoke English. Said she did n't live here, and broke for the gate the minute I got to the path."

"You did n't see her?"

"No. Nice voice, though. Young."

The next moment he was alone. Peter in his dressing-gown was running down the staircase to the lower floor, was shouting to the Portier to unlock the door, was a madman in everything but purpose. The Portier let him out and returned to the bedroom.

"The boy above is worse," he said briefly. "A strange doctor has just come, and but now the Herr Doktor Byrne runs to the drug store."

The Portier's wife shrugged her shoulders even while tears filled her eyes.

"What can one expect?" she demanded. "The good Herr Gott has forbidden theft and Rosa says the boy was stolen. Also the druggist has gone to visit his wife's mother."

"Perhaps I may be of service; I shall go up."

"And see for a moment that hussy of the streets! Remain here. I shall go."

Slowly and ponderously she climbed the stairs.

Stewart, left alone, wandered along the dim corridor. He found Peter's excitement rather amusing. So this was where Peter lived, an old house, isolated in a garden where rambled

young women with soft voices. Hello, a youngster asleep! The boy, no doubt.

He wandered on toward the lighted door of the salon and Marie. The place was warm and comfortable, but over it all hung the indescribable odor of drugs that meant illness. He remembered that the boy was frail.

Marie turned as he stopped in the salon doorway, and then rose, white-faced. Across the wide spaces of the room they eyed each other. Marie's crisis had come. Like all crises it was bigger than speech. It was after a distinct pause that she spoke.

"Hast thou brought the police?"

Curiously human, curiously masculine at least was Stewart's mental condition at that moment. He had never loved the girl; it was with tremendous relief he had put her out of his life. And yet —

"So it 's old Peter now, is it?"

"No, no, not that, Walter. He has given me shelter, that is all. I swear it. I look after the boy."

"Who else is here?"

"No one else; but —"

"Tell that rot to some one who does not know you."

"It is true. He never even looks at me. I am wicked, but I do not lie." There was a

catch of hope in her voice. Marie knew men somewhat, but she still cherished the feminine belief that jealousy is love, whereas it is only injured pride. She took a step toward him. "Walter, I am sorry. Do you hate me?" She had dropped the familiar "thou."

Stewart crossed the room until only Peter's table and lamp stood between them.

"I did n't mean to be brutal," he said, rather largely, entirely conscious of his own magnanimity. "It was pretty bad up there and I know it. I don't hate you, of course. That 's hardly possible after — everything."

"You — would take me back?"

"No. It's over, Marie. I wanted to know where you were, that's all; to see that you were comfortable and not frightened. You're a silly child to think of the police."

Marie put a hand to her throat.

"It is the American, of course."

"Yes."

She staggered a trifle, recovered, threw up her head. "Then I wish I had killed her!"

No man ever violently resents the passionate hate of one woman for her rival in his affections. Stewart, finding the situation in hand and Marie only feebly formidable, was rather amused and flattered by the honest fury in her voice. The mouse was under his paw; he would play a bit.

"You'll get over feeling that way, kid. You don't really love me."

"You were my God, that is all."

"Will you let me help you — money, I mean?"

"Keep it for her."

"Peter will be here in a minute." He bent over the table and eyed her with his old, half-bullying, half-playful manner. "Come round here and kiss me for old times."

"No!"

"Come."

She stood stubbornly still, and Stewart, still smiling, took a step or two toward her. Then he stopped, ceased smiling, drew himself up.

"You are quite right and I'm a rotter." Marie's English did not comprehend "rotter," but she knew the tone. "Listen, Marie, I've told the other girl, and there's a chance for me, anyhow. Some day she may marry me. She asked me to see you."

"I do not wish her pity."

"You are wasting your life here. You cannot marry, you say, without a *dot*. There is a chance in America for a clever girl. You are clever, little Marie. The first money I can spare I'll send you — if you'll take it. It's all I can do."

This was a new Stewart, a man she had never

known. Marie recoiled from him, eyed him nervously, sought in her childish mind for an explanation. When at last she understood that he was sincere, she broke down. Stewart, playing a new part and raw in it, found the situation irritating. But Marie's tears were not entirely bitter. Back of them her busy young mind was weaving a new warp of life, with all of America for its loom. Hope that had died lived again. Before her already lay that great country where women might labor and live by the fruit of their labor, where her tawdry past would be buried in the center of distant Europe. New life beckoned to the little Marie that night in the old salon of Maria Theresa, beckoned to her as it called to Stewart, opportunity to one, love and work to the other. To America!

"I will go," she said at last simply. "And I will not trouble you there."

"Good!" Stewart held out his hand and Marie took it. With a quick gesture she held it to her cheek, dropped it.

Peter came back half an hour later, downcast but not hopeless. He had not found Harmony, but life was not all gray. She was well, still in Vienna, and — she had come back! She had cared then enough to come back. To-morrow he would commence again, would

comb the city fine, and when he had found her he would bring her back, the wanderer, to a marvelous welcome.

He found Stewart gone, and Marie feverishly overhauling her few belongings by the salon lamp. She turned to him a face still stained with tears but radiant with hope.

"Peter," she said gravely, "I must prepare my outfit. I go to America."

"With Stewart?"

"Alone, Peter, to work, to be very good, to be something. I am very happy, although — Peter, may I kiss you?"

"Certainly," said Peter, and took her caress gravely, patting her thin shoulder. His thoughts were in the garden with Harmony, who had cared enough to come back.

"Life," said Peter soberly, "life is just one damned thing after another, is n't it?"

But Marie was anxiously examining the hem of a skirt.

The letter from Anita reached Stewart the following morning. She said: —

"I have been thinking things over, Walter, and I am going to hurt you very much — but not, believe me, without hurting myself. Perhaps my uppermost thought just now is that I am disappointing you, that I am not so big

as you thought I would be. For now, in this final letter, I can tell you how much I cared. Oh, my dear, I *did* care!

"But I will not marry you. And when this reaches you I shall have gone very quietly out of your life. I find that such philosophy as I have does not support me to-night, that all my little rules of life are inadequate. Individual liberty was one — but there is no liberty of the individual. Life — other lives — press too closely. You, living your life as seemed best and easiest, and carrying down with you into shipwreck the little Marie and — myself!

"For, face to face with the fact, I cannot accept it, Walter. It is not only a question of my past against yours. It is of steady revolt and loathing of the whole thing; not the flash of protest before one succumbs to the inevitable, but a deep-seated hatred that is a part of me and that would never forget.

"You say that you are the same man I would have married, only more honest for concealing nothing. But — and forgive me this, it insists on coming up in my mind — were you honest, really? You told me, and it took courage, but was n't it partly fear? What motive is unmixed? Honesty — and fear, Walter. You were preparing against a contingency, although you may not admit this to yourself.

"I am not passing judgment on you. God forbid that I should! I am only trying to show you what is in my mind, and that this break is final. The revolt is in myself, against something sordid and horrible which I will not take into my life. And for that reason time will make no difference.

"I am not a child, and I am not unreasonable. But I ask a great deal of this life of mine that stretches ahead, Walter — home and children, the love of a good man, the fulfillment of my ideals. And you ask me to start with a handicap. I cannot do it. I know you are resentful, but — I know that you understand.

"ANITA."

CHAPTER XXV

THE little Georgiev was in trouble those days. The Balkan engine was threatening to explode, but continued to gather steam, with Bulgaria sitting on the safety-valve. Austria was mobilizing troops, and there were long conferences in the Burg between the Emperor and various bearded gentlemen, while the military prayed in the churches for war.

The little Georgiev hardly ate or slept. Much hammering went on all day in the small room below Harmony's on the Wollbadgasse. At night, when the man in the green velours hat took a little sleep, mysterious packages were carried down the whitewashed staircase and loaded into wagons waiting below. Once on her window-sill Harmony found among the pigeons a carrier pigeon with a brass tube fastened to its leg.

On the morning after Harmony's flight from the garden in the Street of Seven Stars, she received a visit from Georgiev. She had put in a sleepless night, full of heart-searching. She charged herself with cowardice in running away from Peter and Jimmy when they needed her,

and in going back like a thief the night before. The conviction that the boy was not so well brought with it additional introspection — her sacrifice seemed useless, almost childish. She had fled because two men thought it necessary, in order to save her reputation, to marry her; and she did not wish to marry. Marriage was fatal to the career she had promised herself, had been promised. But this career, for which she had given up everything else — would she find it in the workroom of a dressmaker?

Ah, but there was more to it than that. Suppose — how her cheeks burned when she thought of it! — suppose she had taken Peter at his word and married him? What about Peter's career? Was there any way by which Peter's poverty for one would be comfort for two? Was there any reason why Peter, with his splendid ability, should settle down to the hack-work of general practice, the very slough out of which he had so painfully climbed?

Either of two things — go back to Peter, but not to marry him, or stay where she was. How she longed to go back only Harmony knew. There in the little room, with only the pigeons to see, she held out her arms longingly. "Peter!" she said. "Peter, dear!"

She decided, of course, to stay where she was, a burden to no one. The instinct of the

young girl to preserve her good name at any cost outweighed the vision of Peter at the window, haggard and tired, looking out. It was Harmony's chance, perhaps, to do a big thing; to prove herself bigger than her fears, stronger than convention. But she was young, bewildered, afraid. And there was this element, stronger than any of the others — Peter had never told her he loved her. To go back, throwing herself again on his mercy, was unthinkable. On his love — that was different. But what if he did not love her? He had been good to her; but then Peter was good to every one.

There was something else. If the boy was worse what about his mother? Whatever she was or had been, she was his mother. Suppose he were to die and his mother not see him? Harmony's sense of fairness rebelled. In the small community at home mother was sacred, her claims insistent.

It was very early, hardly more than dawn. The pigeons cooed on the sill; over the ridge of the church roof, across, a luminous strip foretold the sun. An oxcart, laden with vegetables for the market, lumbered along the streets. Puzzled and unhappy, Harmony rose and lighted her fire, drew on her slippers and the faded silk kimono with the pink butterflies.

In the next room the dressmaker still slept,

dreaming early morning dreams of lazy apprentices, overdue bills, complaining customers.

Harmony moved lightly not to disturb her. She set her room in order, fed the pigeons,— it was then she saw the carrier with its message, — made her morning coffee by setting the tiny pot inside the stove. And all the time, moving quietly through her morning routine, she was there in that upper room in body only.

In soul she was again in the courtyard back of the old lodge, in the Street of Seven Stars, with the rabbits stirring in the hutch, and Peter, with rapt eyes, gazing out over the city. Bed, toilet-table, coffee-pot, Peter; pigeons, rolls, Peter; sunrise over the church roof, and Peter again. Always Peter!

Monia Reiff was stirring in the next room. Harmony could hear her, muttering and putting coal on the stove and calling to the Hungarian maid for breakfast. Harmony dressed hastily. It was one of her new duties to prepare the workroom for the day. The luminous streak above the church was rose now, time for the day to begin.

She was not certain at once that some one had knocked at the door, so faint was the sound.

She hesitated, listened. The knob turned slightly. Harmony, expecting Monia, called "Come in."

It was the little Georgiev, very apologetic, rather gray of face. He stood in the doorway with his finger on his lips, one ear toward the stairway. It was very silent. Monia was drinking her coffee in bed, whither she had retired for warmth.

"Pardon!" said the Bulgarian in a whisper. "I listened until I heard you moving about. Ah, Fräulein, that I must disturb you!"

"Something has happened!" exclaimed Harmony, thinking of Peter, of course.

"Not yet. I fear it is about to happen. Fräulein, do me the honor to open your window. My pigeon comes now to you to be fed, and I fear — on the sill, Fräulein."

Harmony opened the window. The wild pigeons scattered at once, but the carrier, flying out a foot or two, came back promptly and set about its breakfast.

"Will he let me catch him?"

"Pardon, Fräulein, If I may enter —"

"Come in, of course."

Evidently the defection of the carrier had been serious. A handful of grain on a wrong window-sill, and kingdoms overthrown! Georgiev caught the pigeon and drew the message from the tube. Even Harmony grasped the seriousness of the situation. The little Bul-

garian's face, from gray became livid; tiny beads of cold sweat came out on his forehead.

"What have I done?" cried Harmony. "Oh, what have I done? If I had known about the pigeon —"

Georgiev recovered himself.

"The Fräulein can do nothing wrong," he said. "It is a matter of an hour's delay, that is all. It may not be too late."

Monia Reiff, from the next room, called loudly for more coffee. The sulky Hungarian brought it without a glance in their direction.

"Too late for what?"

"Fräulein, if I may trouble you — but glance from the window to the street below. It is of an urgency, or I — Please, Fräulein!"

Harmony glanced down into the half-light of the street. Georgiev, behind her, watched her, breathless, expectant. Harmony drew in her head.

"Only a man in a green hat," she said. "And down the street a group of soldiers."

"Ah!"

The situation dawned on the girl then, at least partially.

"They are coming for you?"

"It is possible. But there are many soldiers in Vienna."

"And I with the pigeon — Oh, it 's too horri-

ble! Herr Georgiev, stay here in this room. Lock the door. Monia will say that it is mine —"

"Ah no, Fräulein! It is quite hopeless. Nor is it a matter of the pigeon. It is war, Fräulein. Do not distress yourself. It is but a matter of — imprisonment."

"There must be something I can do," desperately. "I hear them below. Is there no way to the roof, no escape?"

"None, Fräulein. It was an oversight. War is not my game; I am a man of peace. You have been very kind to me, Fräulein. I thank you."

"You are not going down!"

"Pardon, but it is better so. Soldiers they are of the provinces mostly, and not for a lady to confront."

"They are coming up!"

He listened. The clank of scabbards against the stone stairs was unmistakable. The little Georgiev straightened, threw out his chest, turned to descend, faltered, came back a step or two.

His small black eyes were fixed on Harmony's face.

"Fräulein," he said huskily, "you are very lovely. I carry always in my heart your image. Always so long as I live. Adieu."

He drew his heels together, gave a stiff little

bow and was gone down the staircase. Harmony was frightened, stricken. She collapsed in a heap on the floor of her room, her fingers in her ears. But she need not have feared. The little Georgiev made no protest, submitted to the inevitable like a gentleman and a soldier, went out of her life, indeed, as unobtrusively as he had entered it.

The carrier pigeon preened itself comfortably on the edge of the washstand. Harmony ceased her hysterical crying at last and pondered what was best to do. Monia was still breakfasting so incredibly brief are great moments. After a little thought Harmony wrote a tiny message, English, German, and French, and inclosed it in the brass tube.

"The Herr Georgiev has been arrested," she wrote. An hour later the carrier rose lazily from the window-sill, flapped its way over the church roof and disappeared, like Georgiev, out of her life. Grim-visaged war had touched her and passed on.

The incident was not entirely closed, however. A search of the building followed the capture of the little spy. Protesting tenants were turned out, beds were dismantled, closets searched, walls sounded for hidden hollows. In one room on Harmony's floor was found stored a quantity of ammunition.

It was when the three men who had conducted the search had finished, when the boxes of ammunition had been gathered in the hall, and the chattering sewing-girls had gone back to work, that Harmony, on her way to her dismantled room, passed through the upper passage.

She glanced down the staircase where little Georgiev had so manfully descended.

"I carry always in my heart your image. Always so long as I live."

The clatter of soldiers on their way down to the street came to her ears; the soft cooing of the pigeons, the whirr of sewing-machines from the workroom. The incident was closed, except for the heap of ammunition boxes on the landing, guarded by an impassive soldier.

Harmony glanced at him. He was eying her steadily, thumbs in, heels in, toes out, chest out. Harmony put her hand to her heart.

"You!" she said.

The conversation of a sentry, save on a holiday is, "Yea, yea," and "Nay, nay."

"Yes, Fräulein."

Harmony put her hands together, a little gesture of appeal, infinitely touching.

"You will not say that you have found, have seen me?"

"No, Fräulein."

It was in Harmony's mind to ask all her

hungry heart craved to learn — of Peter, of Jimmy, of the Portier, of anything that belonged to the old life in the Siebensternstrasse. But there was no time. The sentry's impassive face became rigid; he looked through her, not at her. Harmony turned.

The man in the green hat was coming up the staircase. There was no further chance to question. The sentry was set to carrying the boxes down the staircase.

Full morning now, with the winter sun shining on the beggars in the market, on the crowds in the parks, on the flower sellers in the Stephansplatz; shining on Harmony's golden head as she bent over a bit of chiffon, on the old milkwoman carrying up the whitewashed staircase her heavy cans of milk; on the carrier pigeon winging its way to the south; beating in through bars to the exalted face of Herr Georgiev; resting on Peter's drooping shoulders, on the neglected mice and the wooden soldier, on the closed eyes of a sick child — the worshiped sun, peering forth — the golden window of the East.

CHAPTER XXVI

JIMMY was dying. Peter, fighting hard, was beaten at last. All through the night he had felt it; during the hours before the dawn there had been times when the small pulse wavered, flickered, almost ceased. With the daylight there had been a trifle of recovery, enough for a bit of hope, enough to make harder Peter's acceptance of the inevitable.

The boy was very happy, quite content and comfortable. When he opened his eyes he smiled at Peter, and Peter, gray of face, smiled back. Peter died many deaths that night.

At daylight Jimmy fell into a sleep that was really stupor. Marie, creeping to the door in the faint dawn, found the boy apparently asleep and Peter on his knees beside the bed. He raised his head at her footstep and the girl was startled at the suffering in his face. He motioned her back.

"But you must have a little sleep, Peter."

"No. I 'll stay until — Go back to bed. It is very early."

Peter had not been able after all to secure the Nurse Elisabet, and now it was useless. At

eight o'clock he let Marie take his place, then he bathed and dressed and prepared to face another day, perhaps another night. For the child's release came slowly. He tried to eat breakfast, but managed only a cup of coffee.

Many things had come to Peter in the long night, and one was insistent — the boy's mother was in Vienna and he was dying without her. Peter might know in his heart that he had done the best thing for the child, but like Harmony his early training was rising now to accuse him. He had separated mother and child. Who was he to have decided the mother's unfitness, to have played destiny? How lightly he had taken the lives of others in his hand, and to what end? Harmony, God knows where; the boy dying without his mother. Whatever that mother might be, her place that day was with her boy. What a wreck he had made of things! He was humbled as well as stricken, poor Peter!

In the morning he sent a note to McLean, asking him to try to trace the mother and inclosing the music-hall clipping and the letter. The letter, signed only "Mamma," was not helpful. The clipping might prove valuable.

"And for Heaven's sake be quick," wrote Peter. "This is a matter of hours. I meant well, but I 've done a terrible thing. Bring her, Mac, no matter what she is or where you find her."

The Portier carried the note. When he came up to get it he brought in his pocket a small rabbit and a lettuce leaf. Never before had the combination failed to arouse and amuse the boy. He carried the rabbit down again sorrowfully. "He saw it not," he reported sadly to his wife. " Be off to the church while I deliver this letter. And this rabbit we will not cook, but keep in remembrance."

At eleven o'clock Marie called Peter, who was asleep on the horsehair sofa.

"He asks for you."

Peter was instantly awake and on his feet. The boy's eyes were open and fixed on him.

"Is it another day?" he asked.

"Yes, boy; another morning."

"I am cold, Peter."

They blanketed him, although the room was warm. From where he lay he could see the mice. He watched them for a moment. Poor Peter, very humble, found himself wondering in how many ways he had been remiss. To see this small soul launched into eternity without a foreword, without a bit of light for the journey! Peter's religion had been one of life and living, not of creed.

Marie, bringing jugs of hot water, bent over Peter.

"He knows, poor little one!" she whispered.

And so, indeed, it would seem. The boy, revived by a spoonful or two of broth, asked to have the two tame mice on the bed. Peter, opening the cage, found one dead, very stiff and stark. The catastrophe he kept from the boy.

"One is sick, Jimmy boy," he said, and placed the mate, forlorn and shivering, on the pillow. After a minute: —

"If the sick one dies will it go to heaven?"

"Yes, honey, I think so."

The boy was silent for a time. Thinking was easier than speech. His mind too worked slowly. It was after a pause, while he lay there with closed eyes, that Peter saw two tears slip from under his long lashes. Peter bent over and wiped them away, a great ache in his heart.

"What is it, dear?"

"I'm afraid — it's going to die!"

"Would that be so terrible, Jimmy boy?" asked Peter gently. "To go to heaven, where there is no more death or dying, where it is always summer and the sun always shines?"

No reply for a moment. The little mouse sat up on the pillow and rubbed its nose with a pinkish paw. The baby mice in the cage nuzzled their dead mother.

"Is there grass?"

"Yes — soft green grass."

"Do — boys in heaven — go in their bare feet?" Ah, small mind and heart, so terrified and yet so curious!

"Indeed, yes." And there on his knees beside the white bed Peter painted such a heaven as no theologue has ever had the humanity to paint — a heaven of babbling brooks and laughing, playing children, a heaven of dear departed puppies and resurrected birds, of friendly deer, of trees in fruit, of speckled fish in bright rivers. Painted his heaven with smiling eyes and death in his heart, a child's heaven of games and friendly Indians, of sunlight and rain, sweet sleep and brisk awakening.

The boy listened. He was silent when Peter had finished. Speech was increasingly an effort.

"I should — like — to go there," he whispered at last.

He did not speak again during all the long afternoon, but just at dusk he roused again.

"I would like — to see — the sentry," he said with difficulty.

And so again, and for the last time, Rosa's soldier from Salzburg with one lung.

Through all that long day, then, Harmony sat over her work, unaccustomed muscles aching, the whirring machines in her ears. Monia, upset over the morning's excitement, was irri-

table and unreasonable. The gold-tissue costume had come back from Le Grande with a complaint. Below in the courtyard all day curious groups stood gaping up the staircase, where the morning had seen such occurrences.

At the noon hour, while the girls heated soup and carried in pails of salad from the corner restaurant, Harmony had fallen into the way of playing for them. To the music-loving Viennese girls this was the hour of the day. To sit back, soup bowl on knee, the machines silent, Monia quarreling in the kitchen with the Hungarian servant, and while the pigeons ate crusts on the window-sills, to hear this American girl play such music as was played at the opera, her slim figure swaying, her whole beautiful face and body glowing with the melody she made, the girls found the situation piquant, altogether delightful. Although she did not suspect it, many rumors were rife about Harmony in the workroom. She was not of the people, they said — the daughter of a great American, of course, run away to escape a loveless marriage. This was borne out by the report of one of them who had glimpsed the silk petticoat. It was rumored also that she wore no chemise, but instead an infinitely coquettish series of lace and nainsook garments — of a fineness!

Harmony played for them that day, played,

perhaps, as she had not played since the day she had moved the master to tears, played to Peter as she had seen him at the window, to Jimmy, to the little Georgiev as he went down the staircase. And finally with a choke in her throat to the little mother back home, so hopeful, so ignorant.

In the evening, as was her custom, she took the one real meal of the day at the corner restaurant, going early to avoid the crowd and coming back quickly through the winter night. The staircase was always a peril, to be encountered and conquered night after night and even in the daytime not to be lightly regarded. On her way up this night she heard steps ahead, heavy, measured steps that climbed steadily without pauses. For an instant Harmony thought it sounded like Peter's step and she went dizzy.

But it was not Peter. Standing in the upper hall, much as he had stood that morning over the ammunition boxes, thumbs in, heels in, toes out, chest out, was the sentry.

Harmony's first thought was of Georgiev and more searching of the building. Then she saw that the sentry's impassive face wore lines of trouble. He saluted. "Please, Fräulein."

"Yes?"

"I have not told the Herr Doktor."

"I thank you."

"But the child dies."

"Jimmy?"

"He dies all of last night and to-day. To-night, it is, perhaps, but of moments."

Harmony clutched at the iron stair-rail for support. "You are sure? You are not telling me so that I will go back?"

"He dies, Fräulein. The Herr Doktor has not slept for many hours. My wife, Rosa, sits on the stair to see that none disturb, and her cousin, the wife of the Portier, weeps over the stove. Please, Fräulein, come with me."

"When did you leave the Siebensternstrasse?"

"But now."

"And he still lives?"

"Ja, Fräulein, and asks for you."

Now suddenly fell away from the girl all pride, all fear, all that was personal and small and frightened, before the reality of death. She rose, as women by divine gift do rise, to the crisis; ceased trembling, got her hat and coat and her shabby gloves and joined the sentry again. Another moment's delay — to secure the Le Grande's address from Monia. Then out into the night, Harmony to the Siebenstern-strasse, the tall soldier to find the dancer at her hotel, or failing that, at the Ronacher Music-Hall.

Harmony took a taxicab — nothing must be spared now — bribed the chauffeur to greater speed, arrived at the house and ran across the garden, still tearless, up the stairs, past Rosa on the upper flight, and rang the bell.

Marie admitted her with only a little gasp of surprise. There was nothing to warn Peter. One moment he sat by the bed, watch in hand, alone, drear, tragic-eyed. The next he had glanced up, saw Harmony and went white, holding to the back of his chair. Their eyes met, agony and hope in them, love and death, rapture and bitterness. In Harmony's, pleading, promise, something of doubt; in Peter's, only yearning, as of empty arms. Then Harmony dared to look at the bed and fell on her knees in a storm of grief beside it. Peter bent over and gently stroked her hair.

Le Grande was singing; the boxes were full. In the body of the immense theater waiters scurried back and forward among the tables. Everywhere was the clatter of silver and steel on porcelain, the clink of glasses. Smoke was everywhere — pipes, cigars, cigarettes. Women smoked between bites at the tables, using small paper or silver mouthpieces, even a gold one shone here and there. Men walked up and down among the diners, spraying the air with chemi-

cals to clear it. At a table just below the stage sat the red-bearded Dozent with the lady of the photograph. They were drinking cheap native wines and were very happy.

From the height of his worldly wisdom he was explaining the people to her.

"In the box — don't stare, Liebchen, he looks — is the princeling I have told you of. Roses, of course. Last night it was orchids."

"Last night! Were you here?" He coughed.

"I have been told, Liebchen. Each night he sits there, and when she finishes her song he rises in the box, kisses the flowers and tosses them to her."

"Shameless! Is she so beautiful?"

"No. But you shall see. She comes."

Le Grande was very popular. She occupied the best place on the program; and because she sang in American, which is not exactly English and more difficult to understand, her songs were considered exceedingly risqué. As a matter of fact they were merely ragtime melodies, with a lilt to them that caught the Viennese fancy, accustomed to German sentimental ditties and the artificial forms of grand opera. And there was another reason for her success. She carried with her a chorus of a dozen pickaninnies.

In Austria darkies were as rare as cats, and

there were no cats! So the little chorus had made good. Le Grande was a good advertiser. Each day she walked in the Prater, ermine from head to foot, and behind her two by two trailed twelve little Southern darkies in red-velvet coats and caps, grinning sociably. When she drove a pair sat on the boot.

Her voice was strong, not sweet, spoiled by years of singing against dishes and bottles in smoky music halls; spoiled by cigarettes and absinthe and foreign cocktails that resembled their American prototypes as the night resembles the day.

She wore the gold dress, décolletée, slashed to the knee over rhinestone-spangled stockings. And back of her trailed the twelve little darkies.

She sang "Dixie," of course, and the "Old Folks at Home"; then a ragtime medley, with the chorus showing rows of white teeth and clogging with all their short legs. Le Grande danced to that, a whirling, nimble dance. The little rhinestones on her stockings flashed; her opulent bosom quivered. The Dozent, eyes on the dancer, squeezed his companion's hand.

"I love thee!" he whispered, rather flushed.

And then she sang "Doan ye cry, mah honey." Her voice, rather coarse but melodious, lent itself to the negro rhythm, the swing and lilt of the lullaby. The little darkies, eyes rolling,

preternaturally solemn, linked arms and swayed rhythmically, right, left, right, left. The glasses ceased clinking; sturdy citizens forgot their steak and beer for a moment and listened, knife and fork poised. Under the table the Dozent's hand pressed its captive affectionately, his eyes no longer on Le Grande, but on the woman across, his sweetheart, she who would be mother of his children. The words meant little to the audience; the rich, rolling Southern lullaby held them rapt: —

"Doan ye cry, mah honey,
Doan ye weep no mo',
Mammy 's gwine to hold her baby,
All de udder black trash sleepin' on the flo',
Mammy only lubs her boy."

The little darkies swayed; the singer swayed, empty arms cradled.

"Doan ye cry, mah honey,
Doan ye weep no mo' — "

She picked the tiniest darky up and held him, woolly head against her breast, and crooned to him, rocking on her jeweled heels. The crowd applauded; the man in the box kissed his flowers and flung them. Glasses and dishes clinked again.

The Dozent bent across the table.

"Some day — " he said.

The girl blushed.

Le Grande made her way into the wings, surrounded by her little troupe. A motherly colored woman took them, shooed them off, rounded them up like a flock of chickens.

And there in the wings, grimly impassive, stood a private soldier of the old Franz Josef, blocking the door to her dressing room. For a moment gold dress and dark blue-gray uniform fronted each other. Then the sentry touched his cap.

"Madam," he said, "the child is in th Siebensternstrasse and to-night he dies."

"What child?" Her arms were full of flowers.

"The child from the hospital. Please to make haste."

Jimmy died an hour after midnight, quite peacefully, died with one hand in Harmony's and one between Peter's two big ones.

Toward the last he called Peter "Daddy" and asked for a drink. His eyes, moving slowly round the room, passed without notice the gray-faced woman in a gold dress who stood staring down at him, rested a moment on the cage of mice, came to a stop in the doorway, where stood the sentry, white and weary, but refusing rest.

It was Harmony who divined the child's unspoken wish.

"The manual?" she whispered.

The boy nodded. And so just inside the door of the bedroom across from the old salon of Maria Theresa the sentry, with sad eyes but no lack of vigor, went again through the Austrian manual of arms, and because he had no carbine he used Peter's old walking-stick.

When it was finished the boy smiled faintly, tried to salute, lay still.

CHAPTER XXVII

PETER was going back to America and still he had not told Harmony he loved her. It was necessary that he go back. His money had about given out, and there was no way to get more save by earning it. The drain of Jimmy's illness, the inevitable expense of the small grave and the tiny stone Peter had insisted on buying, had made retreat his only course. True, Le Grande had wished to defray all expenses, but Peter was inexorable. No money earned as the dancer earned hers should purchase peaceful rest for the loved little body. And after seeing Peter's eyes the dancer had not insisted.

A week had seen many changes. Marie was gone. After a conference between Stewart and Peter that had been decided on. Stewart raised the money somehow, and Peter saw her off, palpitant and eager, with the pin he had sent her to Semmering at her throat. She kissed Peter on the cheek in the station, rather to his embarrassment. From the lowered window, as the train pulled out, she waved a moist handkerchief.

"I shall be very good," she promised him. The last words he heard above the grinding of the train were her cheery: "To America!"

Peter was living alone in the Street of Seven Stars, getting food where he might happen to be, buying a little now and then from the delicatessen shop across the street. For Harmony had gone back to the house in the Wollbadgasse. She had stayed until all was over and until Marie's small preparations for departure were over. Then, while Peter was at the station, she slipped away again. But this time she left her address. She wrote: —

"You will come to visit me, dear Peter, because I was so lonely before and that is unnecessary now. But you must know that I cannot stay in the Siebensternstrasse. We have each our own fight to make, and you have been trying to fight for us all, for Marie, for dear little Jimmy, for me. You must get back to work now; you have lost so much time. And I am managing well. The Frau Professor is back and will take an evening lesson, and soon I shall have more money from Fräulein Reiff. You can see how things are looking up for me. In a few months I shall be able to renew my music lessons. And then, Peter, — the career!

"HARMONY."

Her address was beneath.

Peter had suffered much. He was thinner, grayer, and as he stood with the letter in his hand he felt that Harmony was right. He could offer her nothing but his shabby self, his problematic future. Perhaps, surely, everything would have been settled, without reason, had he only once taken the girl in his arms, told her she was the breath of life itself to him. But adversity, while it had roused his fighting spirit in everything else, had sapped his confidence.

He had found the letter on his dressing-table, and he found himself confronting his image over it, a tall, stooping figure, a tired, lined face, a coat that bore the impress of many days with a sick child's head against its breast.

So it was over. She had come back and gone again, and this time he must let her go. Who was he to detain her? She would carry herself on to success, he felt; she had youth, hope, beauty and ability. And she had proved the thing he had not dared to believe, that she could take care of herself in the old city. Only — to go away and leave her there!

McLean would remain. No doubt he already had Harmony's address in the Wollbadgasse. Peter was not subtle, no psychologist, but he

had seen during the last few days how the boy watched Harmony's every word, every gesture. And, perhaps, when loneliness and hard work began to tell on her, McLean's devotion would win its reward. McLean's devotion, with all that it meant, the lessons again, community of taste, their common youth! Peter felt old, very tired.

Nevertheless he went that night to the Wollbadgasse. He sent his gray suit to the Portier's wife to be pressed, and getting out his surgical case, as he had once before in the Pension Schwarz, he sewed a button on his overcoat, using the curved needle and the catgut and working with surgeon's precision. Then, still working very carefully, he trimmed the edges of graying hair over his ears, trimmed his cuffs, trimmed his best silk tie, now almost hopeless. He blacked his shoes, and the suit not coming, he donned his dressing-gown and went into Jimmy's room to feed the mice. Peter stood a moment beside the smooth white bed with his face working. The wooden sentry still stood on the bedside table.

It was in Peter's mind to take the mice to Harmony, confess his defeat and approaching retreat, and ask her to care for them. Then he decided against this palpable appeal for sympathy, elected to go empty-handed and dis-

cover merely how comfortable she was or was not. When the time came he would slip out of her life, sending her a letter and leaving McLean on guard.

Harmony was at home. Peter climbed the dark staircase — where Harmony had met the little Georgiev, and where he had gone down to his death — climbed steadily, but without his usual elasticity. The place appalled him — its gloom, its dinginess, its somber quiet. In the daylight, with the pigeons on the sills and the morning sunlight printing the cross of the church steeple on the whitewashed wall, it was peaceful, cloisterlike, with landings that were crypts. But at night it was almost terrifying, that staircase.

Harmony was playing. Peter heard her when he reached the upper landing, playing a sad little strain that gripped his heart. He waited outside before ringing, heard her begin something determinedly cheerful, falter, cease altogether. Peter rang.

Harmony herself admitted him. Perhaps — oh, certainly she had expected him! It would be Peter, of course, to come and see how she was getting on, how she was housed. She held out her hand and Peter took it. Still no words, only a half smile from her and no smile at all from Peter, but his heart in his eyes.

"I hoped you would come, Peter. We may have the reception room."

"You knew I would come," said Peter. "The reception room?"

"Where customers wait." She still carried her violin, and slipped back to her room to put it away. Peter had a glimpse of its poverty and its meagerness. He drew a long breath.

Monia was at the opera, and the Hungarian sat in the kitchen knitting a stocking. The reception room was warm from the day's fire, and in order. All the pins and scraps of the day had been swept up, and the portières that made fitting-rooms of the corners were pushed back. Peter saw only a big room with empty corners, and that at a glance. His eyes were Harmony's.

He sat down awkwardly on a stiff chair; Harmony on a velvet settee. They were suddenly two strangers meeting for the first time. In the squalor of the Pension Schwarz, in the comfortable intimacies of the Street of Seven Stars, they had been easy, unconstrained. Now suddenly Peter was tongue-tied. Only one thing in him clamored for utterance, and that he sternly silenced.

"I — I could not stay there, Peter. You understood?"

"No. Of course, I understood."

"You were not angry?"

"Why should I be angry? You came, like an angel of light, when I needed you. Only, of course, —"

"Yes?"

"I 'll not say that, I think."

"Please say it, Peter!"

Peter writhed; looked everywhere but at her.

"Please, Peter. You said I always came when you needed me, only —"

"Only — I always need you!" Peter, Peter!

"Not always, I think. Of course, when one is in trouble one needs a woman; but —"

"Well, of course — but — I 'm generally in trouble, Harry dear."

Frightfully ashamed of himself by that time was Peter, ashamed of his weakness. He sought to give a casual air to the speech by stooping for a neglected pin on the carpet. By the time he had stuck it in his lapel he had saved his mental forces from the rout of Harmony's eyes.

His next speech he made to the center table, and missed a most delectable look in the aforesaid eyes.

"I did n't come to be silly," he said to the table. "I hate people who whine, and I've got into a damnable habit of being sorry for myself! It's to laugh, is n't it, a great, hulking carcass like me, to be —"

"Peter," said Harmony softly, "are n't you going to look at me?"

"I 'm afraid."

"That 's cowardice. And I've fixed my hair a new way. Do you like it?"

"Splendid," said Peter to the center table.

"You did n't look!"

The rout of Harmony's eyes was supplemented by the rout of Harmony's hair. Peter, goaded, got up and walked about. Harmony was half exasperated; she would have boxed Peter's ears with a tender hand had she dared.

His hands thrust savagely in his pockets, Peter turned and faced her at last.

"First of all," he said, "I am going back to America, Harmony. I 've got all I can get here, all I came for —" He stopped, seeing her face. "Well, of course, that 's not true, I have n't. But I'm going back, anyhow. You need n't look so stricken: I have n't lost my chance. I'll come back sometime again and finish, when I've earned enough to do it."

"You will never come back, Peter. You have spent all your money on others, and now you are going back just where you were, and — you are leaving me here alone!"

"You are alone, anyhow," said Peter, "making your own way and getting along. And McLean will be here."

"Are you turning me over to him?"

No reply. Peter was pacing the floor.

"Peter!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you remember the night in Anna's room at the Schwarz when you proposed to me?"

No reply. Peter found another pin.

"And that night in the old lodge when you proposed to me again?"

Peter turned and looked at her, at her slender, swaying young figure, her luminous eyes, her parted, childish lips.

"Peter, I want you to — to ask me again."

"No!"

"Why?"

"Now, listen to me, Harmony. You're sorry for me, that's all; I don't want to be pitied. You stay here and work. You'll do big things. I had a talk with the master while I was searching for you, and he says you can do anything. But he looked at me — and a sight I was with worry and fright — and he warned me off, Harmony. He says you must not marry."

"Old pig!" said Harmony. "I will marry if I please."

Nevertheless Peter's refusal and the master's speech had told somewhat. She was colder, less vibrant. Peter came to her, stood close, looking down at her.

"I've said a lot I did n't mean to," he said. "There 's only one thing I have n't said, I ought n't to say it, dear. I'm not going to marry you — I won't have such a thing on my conscience. But it does n't hurt a woman to know that a man loves her. I love you, dear. You're my heaven and my earth — even my God, I'm afraid. But *I will not marry you.*"

"Not even if I ask you to?"

"Not even then, dear. To share my struggle —"

"I see," slowly. "It is to be a struggle?"

"A hard fight, Harmony. I'm a pauper practically."

"And what am I?"

"Two poverties don't make a wealth, even of happiness," said Peter steadily. "In the time to come, when you would think of what you might have been, it would be a thousand deaths to me, dear."

"People have married, women have married and carried on their work, too, Peter."

"Not your sort of women or your sort of work. And not my sort of man, Harry. I'm jealous — jealous of every one about you. It would have to be the music or me."

"And you make the choice!" said Harmony proudly. "Very well, Peter, I shall do as you

say. But I think it is a very curious sort of love."

"I wonder," Peter cried, "if you realize what love it is that loves you enough to give you up."

"You have not asked me if I care, Peter."

Peter looked at her. She was very near to tears, very sad, very beautiful.

"I'm afraid to ask," said Peter, and picking up his hat he made for the door. There he turned, looked back, was lost.

"My sweetest heart!" he cried, and took her in his hungry arms. But even then, with her arms about his neck at last, with her slender body held to him, her head on his shoulder, his lips to her soft throat, Peter put her from him as a starving man might put away food.

He held her off and looked at her.

"I'm a fool and a weakling," he said gravely. "I love you so much that I would sacrifice you. You are very lovely, my girl, my girl! As long as I live I shall carry your image in my heart."

Ah, what the little Georgiev had said on his way to the death that waited down the staircase. Peter, not daring to look at her again, put away her detaining hand, squared his shoulders, went to the door.

"Good-bye, Harmony," he said steadily. "Always in my heart!"

Very near the end now: the little Marie on the way to America, with the recording angel opening a new page in life's ledger for her and a red-ink line erasing the other; with Jimmy and his daddy wandering through the heaven of friendly adventure and green fields, hand in hand; with the carrier resting after its labors in the pigeon house by the rose-fields of Sofia; with the sentry casting martial shadows through the barred windows of the hospital; and the little Georgiev, about to die, dividing his heart, as a heritage, between his country and a young girl.

Very near the end, with the morning light of the next day shining into the salon of Maria Theresa and on to Peter's open trunk and shabby wardrobe spread over chairs. An end of trunks and departure, as was the beginning.

Early morning at the Gottesacker, or God's acre, whence little Jimmy had started on his comfortable journey. Early morning on the frost-covered grass, the frozen roads, the snap and sparkle of the Donau. Harmony had taken her problem there, in the early hour before Monia would summon her to labor — took her problem and found her answer.

The great cemetery was still and deserted. Harmony, none too warmly clad, walked briskly, a bunch of flowers in oiled paper against the

cold. Already the air carried a hint of spring; there was a feeling of resurrection and promise. The dead earth felt alive under-foot.

Harmony knelt by the grave and said the little prayer the child had repeated at night and morning. And, because he had loved it, with some vague feeling of giving him comfort, she recited the little verse: —

> "Ah well! For us all some sweet hope lies
> Deeply buried from human eyes:
> And in the hereafter, angels may
> Roll the stone from its grave away."

When she looked up Le Grande was standing beside her.

There was no scene, hardly any tears. She had brought out a great bunch of roses that bore only too clearly the stamp of whence they came. One of the pickaninnies had carried the box and stood impassively by, gazing at Harmony.

Le Grande placed her flowers on the grave. They almost covered it, quite eclipsed Harmony's.

"I come here every morning," she said simply.

She had a cab waiting, and offered to drive Harmony back to the city. Her quiet almost irritated Harmony, until she had looked once into the woman's eyes. After that she knew. It was on the drive back, with the little darky

on the box beside the driver, that Harmony got her answer.

Le Grande put a hand over Harmony's.

"I tried to tell you before how good I know you were to him."

"We loved him."

"And I resented it. But Dr. Byrne was right — I was not a fit person to — to have him."

"It was not that — not only that —"

"Did he ever ask for me? But of course not."

"No, he had no remembrance."

Silence for a moment. The loose windows of the cab clattered.

"I loved him very much when he came," said Le Grande, "although I did not want him. I had been told I could have a career on the stage. Ah, my dear, I chose the career — and look at me! What have I? A grave in the cemetery back there, and on it roses sent me by a man I loathe! If I could live it over again!"

The answer was very close now: —

"Would you stay at home?"

"Who knows, I being I? And my husband did not love me. It was the boy always. There is only one thing worth while — the love of a good man. I have lived, lived hard. And I know."

"But supposing that one has real ability —

I mean some achievement already, and a promise —"

Le Grande turned and looked at Harmony shrewdly.

"I see. You are a musician, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And — it is Dr. Byrne?"

"Yes."

Le Grande bent forward earnestly.

"My child," she said, "if one man in all the world looked at me as your doctor looks at you, I — I would be a better woman."

"And my music?"

"Play for your children, as you played for my little boy."

Peter was packing: wrapping medical books in old coats, putting clean collars next to boots, folding pajamas and such-like negligible garments with great care and putting in his dress-coat in a roll. His pipes took time, and the wooden sentry he packed with great care and a bit of healthy emotion. Once or twice he came across trifles of Harmony's, and he put them carefully aside — the sweater coat, a folded handkerchief, a bow she had worn at her throat. The bow brought back the night before and that reckless kiss on her white throat. Well for Peter to get away if he is to

keep his resolution, when the sight of a ribbon bow can bring that look of suffering into his eyes.

The Portier below was polishing floors, right foot, left foot, any foot at all. And as he polished he sang in a throaty tenor.

"Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühen," he sang at the top of his voice, and coughed, a bit of floor wax having got into the air. The antlers of the deer from the wild-game shop hung now in his bedroom. When the wild-game seller came over for coffee there would be a discussion probably. But were not the antlers of all deer similar?

The Portier's wife came to the doorway with a cooking fork in her hand.

"A cab," she announced, "with a devil's imp on the box. Perhaps it is that American dancer. Run and pretty thyself!"

It was too late for more than an upward twist of a mustache. Harmony was at the door, but not the sad-eyed Harmony of a week before or the undecided and troubled girl of before that. A radiant Harmony, this, who stood in the doorway, who wished them good-morning, and ran up the old staircase with glowing eyes and a heart that leaped and throbbed. A woman now, this Harmony, one who had looked on life and learned; one who had chosen her fate

and was running to meet it; one who feared only death, not life or anything that life could offer.

The door was not locked. Perhaps Peter was not up — not dressed. What did that matter? What did anything matter but Peter himself?

Peter, sorting out lectures on McBurney's Point, had come across a bit of paper that did not belong there, and was sitting by his open trunk, staring blindly at it: —

"You are very kind to me. Yes, indeed.

"H. W."

Quite the end now, with Harmony running across the room and dropping down on her knees among a riot of garments — down on her knees, with one arm round Peter's neck, drawing his tired head lower until she could kiss him.

"Oh, Peter, Peter, dear!" she cried. "I 'll love you all my life if only you'll love me, and never, never let me go."

Peter was dazed at first. He put his arms about her rather unsteadily, because he had given her up and had expected to go through the rest of life empty of arm and heart. And when one has one's arms set, as one may say, for loneliness and relinquishment it is rather

difficult — Ah, but Peter got the way of it swiftly.

"Always," he said incoherently; "forever the two of us. Whatever comes, Harmony?"

"Whatever comes."

"And you'll not be sorry?"

"Not if you love me."

Peter kissed her on the eyes very solemnly.

"God helping me, I'll be good to you always. And I'll always love you."

He tried to hold her away from him for a moment after that, to tell her what she was doing, what she was giving up. She would not be reasoned with.

"I love you," was her answer to every line. And it was no divided allegiance she promised him. "Career? I shall have a career. Yours!"

"And your music?"

She colored, held him closer.

"Some day," she whispered, "I shall tell you about that."

Late winter morning in Vienna, with the school-children hurrying home, the Alserstrasse alive with humanity — soldiers and chimney-sweeps, housewives and beggars. Before the hospital the crowd lines up along the curb; the head waiter from the coffee-house across comes to the doorway and looks out. The sentry

in front of the hospital ceases pacing and stands at attention.

In the street a small procession comes at the double quick — a handful of troopers, a black van with tiny, high-barred windows, more troopers.

Inside the van a Bulgarian spy going out to death — a swarthy little man with black eyes and short, thick hands, going out like a gentleman and a soldier to meet the God of patriots and lovers.

The sentry, who was only a soldier from Salzburg with one lung, was also a gentleman and a patriot. He uncovered his head.

THE END

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